

**CARRINGTON'S
A NOVEL WITH COMPLEMENTARY DISCOURSES**

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ABSTRACT

Comprising of a novel and complementary discourses, this thesis investigates the traditional distinctions between theory and creative practice, and contributes new insights into the practice, craft, and theory of the contemporary novel.

Carrington's is a novel about people living with the complexities of mid-life, set against the backdrop of a busy department store. Alongside the novel, my research looks at the question of whether the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity. As part of testing this theory, I have been able to compare the process of writing an unplanned novel (*Cappuccinos*) and a second novel (*Carrington's*) which involved much planning. I investigated where creativity comes from and looked at the physiology of the body and the two hemispheres of the human brain. In relation to that, I looked also at the education system that has weighed heavily on left brain teaching and ignored the right brain qualities of creative students. I interviewed six published authors, including Susan Hill and Joan Bakewell, to investigate the processes they use in taking an initial idea through to a final draft. A further exploration was made of the 50,000 word annual National Novel Writing Month competition which has no planning methods. I also examine the methods used in the writing of my novel and make a study of literary craft.

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CARRINGTON'S

A Novel

**The old believe everything;
the middle-aged suspect everything;
the young know everything.**

Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)

Dedicated to

Marsha Back

1.

The fifth of September 1967 would see the first of many turning points in William Patterson's life. At 52 he had climbed the corporate ladder to become manager of the largest department store in the North West. The next move would be to replace John Gray who, as Area Manager, was due to retire in eighteen months. After that would come a directorship. But, unbeknown to him, a chain of events were about to upset his well-ordered life.

After a long day at work the gravel scrunched beneath the high powered wheels of his Jaguar as he swept into the drive of 7 Church Close. The detached Victorian house with its red front door was nestled in the corner overlooking the grey stone church. He and Helen had been married for twenty five years. She was, he thought, the perfect company wife – taking care of the home and having a few voluntary jobs to keep her occupied.

He got out and let himself into the house. 'Only me,' he called.

Helen came to greet him and gave him a peck on the cheek. He flicked through the post on the hall table, putting flyers into the bin and taking letters into his study. He sat down and took out his diary. He smiled as he saw the blank week ahead. Here in the quiet room he would clear his head of the stress of the day – the daily meetings, the staff problems, and the demands of head office. Helen would see there were no phone calls or interruptions. Now all of these could, for one hour, be a distant memory.

On the dark oak desk several files were stacked in a metal tray, neatly sharpened pencils stood in a round wooden container, and books, categorised

into genres, sat on the shelves. Only the ticking of the wall clock broke the silence.

The door opened and Helen put a cup of coffee on the silver coaster on the desk. He nodded but didn't look up. She closed the door quietly on her way out.

The coffee was strong with just a hint of cream and while drinking it he glanced through the leaded-light window. The close was quiet. The confetti strewn on the pavement was the only evidence of a wedding earlier in the day. Now the morning suits, large colourful hats, and cars had disappeared and Church Close was back to its peaceful setting. He switched his gaze back to the desk and took one last look at the speech he would deliver at the silver wedding party that night. He'd start with thanking guests for attending, then crack the two old men on a park bench joke which he had recently heard, and finally praise Helen for being such a loyal wife.

He opened the desk drawer. There in the white envelope were the tickets for the flight to Tenerife. It would be a complete surprise for Helen. On Monday they'd fly out for a whole week in the sun. This would, he thought, make up for all previous holidays that were cancelled at the last minute due to the pressures of work. He couldn't wait to see the look on her face when he told her.

Upstairs in the bedroom Helen finished applying her make-up. She felt weary after spending the afternoon serving meals to senior citizens at the Crossfield Centre. Now putting on a midnight-blue velvet dress, she stepped in front of the full length mirror and forced a smile. However, it did little to disguise the feeling of dread she had in the pit of her stomach. The party tonight was a celebration of

twenty five years of marriage. But, having felt unsettled for such a long time, she found it difficult to raise her spirits. Their only child, Catherine, now lived in Canada and, despite keeping in touch with phone calls and letters she missed her dreadfully. Gone were the girly shopping trips, the Saturday meetings where they would linger over a pot of freshly brewed coffee, and the long conversations into the night. James had arrived in Cathy's life and within six months he'd whisked her away across the Atlantic to a new life in Toronto. Now Helen had to address the void in her life. The charitable events she'd organised with great expertise over the years were no longer enough. At forty eight she still felt capable of having a more fulfilling existence. But William had always wanted her at home. He needed someone available to entertain clients, to chauffeur him to and from airports, and to just be there for him. But being there was not enough. Not anymore.

She looked again at her reflection and smiled. She had plenty to offer – a lifetime of experience of running a home. And so it was that two weeks earlier she decided to break out of the claustrophobic world she had existed in for so long. On Monday morning she would be sitting at her new desk as a PA at the legal offices of Barker, Barker, and Slater. It would be the start of a new chapter in her life. Now all she had to do was tell William.

Two hours later at the Grange Hotel, William was coming to the closing part of his speech when a sudden ringing interrupted his flow.

'Whoops!' said Margaret Haddock, as she rooted in her large purple handbag. Unable to stop the ringing she turned her bag upside down and

emptied the contents onto the floor. Among the make-up, keys and loose change she found a small alarm clock and switched it off.

William frowned and then continued. 'Ladies and gentlemen, as I was saying, before we were interrupted by the alarm clock, I'd like to say a very special thank you to my wife for being such a tower of strength throughout our marriage.' He paused while there was a round of applause. 'As you know, being a company wife takes a lot of hard work. She has been there night and day for me.' There was another round of applause and someone from the back shouted 'Hear, hear!' He put his speech back in his pocket and raised his hand. 'Now, please take your seats and enjoy the meal.'

He placed his hand round Helen's waist and gave it a squeeze. 'Well done. You've arranged this party magnificently.'

'Thank you,' she said, as she took her seat.

Her best friend, Verity, drained the contents of her glass. 'This woman is a saint, William. I think she could even organise a royal wedding. Don't you?'

'Yes, you're right. She's an excellent organiser. But now Catherine has flown the nest it'll be just the two of us.'

'That's right,' replied Verity. 'But it's bound to leave a gap in Helen's life. You know how close they were.'

'Nonsense! She'll have plenty to do. Most probably take on more charitable events. In fact I was talking to someone this last week who wants a capable woman on their committee.'

Verity raised her eyebrows and exchanged a look with Helen.

‘Now,’ he said, checking his watch, ‘if you’ll excuse me I want a word with Martin over there before the meal gets underway.’ He squeezed past her chair.

Verity looked at Helen. ‘You’ve not told him have you?’

‘No. I couldn’t face a scene before the party.’

‘So you’ll tell him tonight then?’

‘Yes. He won’t like it. But it’s not as if we have anything planned.’

On a corner table, Toby Benson, drained the last few drops of his wine. He had been watching Kirsty from cosmetics for some time. Her long legs, encased in black stockings, seemed to go on forever and her blonde hair was tied up in a loose knot. She was on the next table and chatting to the gentleman at her side, laughing and using her hands to explain some detail. He looked again at her legs. She really was the whole package. But his view was interrupted by a waiter who leaned in front of him.

‘Carrots and broccoli, sir?’

‘Thank you,’ he replied, and watched as the vegetables, wedged between a spoon and fork, were put on his plate. He looked at the other guests on the table and sighed. To his left sat Margaret Haddock. Tonight, squeezed into a silk red dress that refused to disguise her large bulk, she was unaware of being watched as she piled carrots on her fork and put them in her mouth. The white haired old fossil opposite was, he discovered, as deaf as a post and kept referring to him as Tony. The fossil’s wife, a whippet like grey haired woman with a pointed nose, was playing with her food, moving roast potatoes to the corner of her plate and every so often taking a miniature bite. He caught the waiter’s eye and ordered a

bottle of claret. When the wine arrived he filled his glass and put the bottle back on the table. He was just about to take a sip when he felt a dig in the ribs from his left.

‘Oi!’ cried Margaret. ‘Fill mine up as well.’

‘Sorry,’ he said, picking up the bottle.

‘And fill it to the top,’ she said. ‘I don’t want one of those miserable pub measures.’

He filled her glass. She picked it up and took a large gulp. ‘That’s better. Bloody good wine that. Mind you, I’ll drink anything going.’

He watched her wipe her mouth on the back of her hand. Her orange hair, the latest in a variety of colours she’d sported, was kept in check by a tight perm and lacquered, he noted, to within an inch of its life. He wondered at what stage she’d given up on her appearance. He couldn’t imagine her ever being young. Staff records told him she was only thirty nine. He would be thirty nine in a month but felt light years away from her. And even on a good day she looked at least fifty five. He was slicing his meat when he felt another dig in the ribs.

‘You’re very quiet,’ she said, scooping up a large roast potato and stuffing it in her mouth. ‘Cat got your tongue?’

He took a sip of wine. ‘Sorry, I was miles away.’ He wiped his lips with his napkin. ‘So, Margaret, this must be a nice treat having a meal cooked for you?’

‘Certainly is,’ she replied, wiping her hands on the tablecloth. ‘Do you know how many meals I cook in Carrington’s canteen every week?’

‘I’ve no idea.’

‘Too bloody many,’ she shrieked, stabbing a large piece of broccoli on her plate with her fork and soaking it in a pool of gravy.

Toby looked across at Kirsty. Her skirt was riding up and exposing her wonderful thighs. He felt another dig in the ribs. It was starting to irritate him and he was getting quite sore.

‘You look like you need cheering up, young man. We can’t have you being all mopesy on an evening like this can we?’ She put her hand under the table and gave his thigh a squeeze. He felt himself freeze and wondered if anyone had noticed. But the whippet opposite was still pushing food round her plate and the old fossil was engrossed in removing a piece of broccoli from between his front teeth. He adjusted his napkin and at the same time moved his leg away. He felt relieved when the waitress came to serve the dessert, giving him the excuse to move his chair slightly to one side and out of Margaret’s reach.

As the strawberry gateau was served he watched Margaret set about demolishing it with her spoon. She ate quickly and licked her fingers as she reluctantly put down her cutlery. She put her hand to her mouth but it did little to stifle the belch that rattled her windpipe as it exited.

She laughed. ‘Oops! Pardon me.’ She dug Toby in the ribs. ‘Just glad it wasn’t from the other end.’ She leaned in closer. ‘If you don’t hurry up and finish that pudding I’ll polish it off for you.’

He put down his spoon and passed his plate to her. She attacked it with her cutlery, eating the remaining strawberries and then scooping up the whipped cream. At least, he thought, with more food to eat her hands will be occupied.

After coffee was served Toby visited the Gents and stared at his face in the mirror. God, he thought to himself, why did I have to be put on a table with that stupid bitch. He was turning on the hot water tap when he heard the toilet flush. Out of the cubicle appeared Patrick from menswear. His hair was gelled and had a spiky appearance. He gestured in the direction of the toilet door. 'I wouldn't go in there for a couple of hours if I were you.'

'Yeah, thought I recognised the smell.'

'Bloody cheeky bastard.' He looked in the mirror and checked his appearance, running his hands through his hair to accentuate the spikes. 'I see you've got the short straw sitting next to Margaret.'

'Yeah, too bloody right. She's a real pain in the arse.'

'But at least the food here is better than that compost heap she rustles up for us at work. Her chicken curry needs a government warning if you ask me.'

'Christ I've avoided that dish for months. It takes at least three days to get your system back to any semblance of normality after one of those.'

Patrick winked at Toby. 'I've got the delicious Kirsty sitting next to me. I'm going to make sure I take her home.'

Toby gave a guarded smile. Trust Patrick, he thought, to be seated near her. Unless he made a move soon he would miss any chance of asking her out. He returned to his table and refilled his glass with claret.

Margaret, her face flushed with the wine, appeared to be listening intently to the old man opposite describing his pre-retirement job where he was responsible for the transfer of large sums of money into Europe. But then Toby felt a hand moving up his thigh. And he was unable to move as his chair was now pinned against the wall.

At the end of the evening as guests started to leave the party Toby saw Kirsty getting into a taxi with Patrick. He watched as it disappeared into the night. His night had been a disaster and once more he had been beaten by another to get to Kirsty. He now wondered if Patrick had switched the place labels at the meal. He wouldn't put it past him. And goodness knows what girls saw in him – he was a compulsive gambler, loud and unreliable. In a small way he wished he could be more like him, but he was and always would be he knew, the hard working and reliable type. And these qualities had got him to the position of assistant manager. But tonight he felt bloody miserable. He took a taxi home.

As he let himself into his flat he was met by the familiar silence. The flat was part of an old Edwardian house that sat alongside the river. It housed mostly singles. In the week he hardly saw a soul. Only the sound of steps on the stairs reminded him that there were other people living in the house. People that kept themselves to themselves, worked hard, and at weekends played hard. He turned on the coffee percolator and went over the evening he'd just had. 'Christ, what a bloody awful party. Margaret Haddock managed to ruin everything for me.' He thought again about her fat body being squeezed into the tight red dress. And her disgusting table manners – packing in the food as if it was her very last meal.

His thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing. He picked it up. 'Toby Benson.'

'Toby,' said the voice at the other end. 'It's Patrick. Just checking you've recovered from sitting next to Margaret.'

'Yeah, just about. By the way you didn't by any chance swap the seat labels did you?'

‘Now would I do such a thing?’

‘Yes you fucking well would.’

‘In actual fact I didn’t. But what bloody luck being next to Kirsty.’

‘You lucky bastard. But I presume that now you are at home you did not get invited in to her place.’

‘Nope. But there’s always next time.’

‘Maybe there won’t be a next time,’ replied Toby. He was feeling smug that Kirsty had obviously turned Patrick down.

‘You know me. I never give up. Anyway goodnight.’

‘Goodnight,’ said Toby, and replaced the receiver.

He poured himself a coffee and looked round the room with its high ceiling. He sat on the black leather settee. He was tired of moving about the country. He felt the need to put roots down. And if only he had a nice girl to come home to.

Later that evening at Church Close Helen was preparing for bed. She had changed into a silk nightdress and sat looking at her reflection in the dressing table mirror. She opened a jar of cream and started to cleanse her face.

William came up behind her and touched her shoulder. ‘You still look good without make up. You have the complexion of a twenty-year-old.’

She laughed. ‘No twenty-year-old would want to have these lines,’ she said, touching the sides of her eyes.

He went to the en-suite and she could hear his electric toothbrush whirring. He came out, wiping his lips with his hand and got into bed. He

plumped up his pillows and took his book from the bedside cabinet. 'Have we heard from Catherine lately?'

'Yes. I showed you her card, remember? She seems to be keeping busy with her new job.'

He looked up from his book. 'I don't know why she needs a job now she's married. James earns enough surely.'

'William, she loves her job at the museum. It is a very important part of her life.'

'Too important, if you ask me.'

'Well, why should she give up all her education? What would she do? Sit at home?'

He stretched his legs to move into a more comfortable position, kicking the duvet further down the bed. 'Well you were quite happy to do that.'

'Was I?' she said, wiping the last drops of cleanser off her face with a tissue.

A frown crossed his face. 'What do you mean? *Was I?*'

'Well I worked until Catherine was on the way and . . . '

' . . . and then you gave up work and stayed at home,' he interrupted.

She frowned. 'Yes, I did. But it was only because we were moving about the country so much because of your job with Carrington's.'

'And quite right,' he said. 'It would never have been convenient. Not with the hours I put in.' He looked at his book and flicked through the pages to find his place. He then put the book down on his lap and tried to find the switch to adjust the brightness on his bedside lamp. 'Anyway, I've got a surprise for you.'

‘Oh, what’s that?’ she said, now smoothing moisturiser on her face.

‘Well you know how we’ve had to cancel so many holidays in the past?’

‘I know only too well. It was always me that had to ring up and apologise.’

‘Well I’ve decided that to celebrate our silver wedding we’ll go away for a week. It will be just the two of us. How does that sound?’

‘When?’

‘When what?’ he said, still looking for the switch on the lamp.

‘When is the holiday?’ she said.

‘Monday. We fly out early morning to Tenerife. It will be wonderful. Five star hotel on the beach. I’ve already booked a hire car so we can see as much of the island as possible.’ He ran his hand across the lamp still searching for the switch. ‘How do you turn up the brightness on this damn thing?’

‘The switch is at the back,’ she said.

He turned the lamp and pressed the switch. The room became brighter. ‘There we go,’ he said. ‘That’s better.’ He looked up at her. ‘You’re very quiet. Aren’t you excited?’

She stood up and put on her dressing gown. ‘William you should have told me.’

‘But it’s a surprise. Why should I tell you?’

‘Because I can’t go.’

‘What do you mean you can’t go?’ he said, lines forming on his brow.

‘I can’t go because I’ve got a job.’

He threw off the bedclothes and got up. ‘What on earth do you mean? Got a job?’

‘Exactly that.’

‘But you can’t. I’ve booked this holiday.’

‘I start on Monday, William.’

‘But you don’t need to work.’

She raised her eyes heavenwards. ‘But that’s not the point, William.’

‘So what *is* the bloody point?’ he said, his voice rising.

She stared hard. ‘You just don’t get it, do you?’

‘Obviously not.’

‘The point is William that *I* want a life as well. I need to feel useful.’

‘Look,’ he sighed, ‘we’re both tired. We’ll talk about this tomorrow. It’s not too late. I can have a word with this firm on Monday morning.’

‘No,’ she said.

‘What do you mean no?’

‘I’ve already signed a contract of employment. I start at 8.30 on Monday morning.’

‘And that’s your final word, is it?’

‘Yes, it is.’

He put on his dressing gown, struggling with the belt that had got tangled at the back. He gave it a tug and released it. ‘Well, if you don’t want to accompany your husband on holiday then I don’t want to spend the night in the same room.’ He slammed the door as he left and walked along the landing to the spare room. She thought of Catherine starting her new life in Canada. As she looked at her reflection in the dressing table mirror she knew her own adventure was just beginning.

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2.

On Monday morning William walked along the main street to the store. The city centre was quiet, but the remains of a busy weekend were strewn on the pavement – fish and chip papers, cigarette packs, and the stomach contents of a late night reveller.

Toby, who was unlocking a side door, looked up in surprise.

‘Hello boss. I wasn’t expecting to see you today. I thought you were officially on holiday. Tenerife wasn’t it?’

‘It was,’ said William, his face expressing no hint of humour. ‘Change of plans.’

‘I see,’ said Toby.

They walked through the ground floor which housed cosmetics, stationery and luggage. Then they took the escalator to William’s office and William took out a pen from his breast pocket. ‘You’d better bring me up to speed on the day.’

Toby got out his diary and flicked through the pages. ‘We’ve a visit from John Gray at 10am.’

‘Christ! What does that bastard want?’

‘I expect he wants to see how his new area is doing.’

‘God, there’s always someone from Head Office telling us how to run the show.’

‘Yeah. At least we had it cushy with old Peter Watters. Pity he dropped down dead on the golf course like that.’

‘Exactly! And somehow I see Gray becoming a real pain in the arse. What else have we got?’

‘We have the preparation for the sales.’

William leaned back in his black leather chair. ‘Run that date past me will you.’

‘Saturday 25th.’

‘Right, I’ll need to see the heads of department fairly soon. Arrange that. Oh, and yes, book a table at the Talbot for 12 o’clock. It’ll put old Gray in a good mood.’

‘Okay,’ said Toby. ‘I’ll set that up,’ quickly jotting notes in his diary. He got to the door and turned. ‘A good night last night. Really enjoyed it.’

‘Thanks,’ replied William.

‘Damn good organiser, Mrs Patterson.’

‘Er, yes. Thank you.’

‘Right! I’ll get on,’ replied Toby. He closed the door behind him.

William leaned back in his chair. Why, he thought, does Helen have to pick now to launch a career? He got up and moved to the window and looked out over the High Street below. The boutique opposite was receiving stock. Items hanging on a rack enclosed in see through covers were being wheeled into the shop. The delivery truck, parked at an awkward angle, was managing to block the road. A car made an unsuccessful attempt to pass by mounting the pavement. The truck driver locked the back doors and climbed into the driving seat. Oblivious to the mayhem and honking of horns around him, he took his time writing on a clipboard before driving off.

‘Stupid idiot,’ said William to himself. A knock on the door disturbed his thoughts. ‘Come in,’ he called.

Margaret entered with a tray. She grinned impishly.

‘Morning, Mr Patterson. Here’s your tea. And I’ve added a few bourbons – I know they are your favourite.’ She placed the tray on his desk.

‘Thank you, Margaret,’ he said, returning to his chair.

She straightened the lace cloth on the tray. ‘I wasn’t expecting to see you today.’

He scowled. ‘Change of plan,’ he answered, turning to open his diary. She hovered. He looked up. ‘Anything else?’

‘Er, no. I’ll leave you to it then,’ she said, closing the door behind her. He smiled to himself. Now, he thought, she will spend all day trying to discover why I’m in work.

After he had finished his tea he headed for his daily inspection of the store.

Patrick woke with a brain that felt like it was rattling round inside his skull. The party had been good but, as usual, he’d over indulged mixing his drinks into numerous cocktails. If only he hadn’t got so pissed he could have scored with Kirsty. But in the taxi they’d shared he got too enthusiastic and pulled up her skirt exposing her skimpy black pants.

‘Get off!’ she shouted, pulling her skirt back down. They spent the rest of the journey in silence. Eventually as they pulled up outside her house she got out and made her way to the front door slamming it behind her.

‘Where to now?’ said the cabby.

‘Austin Lane,’ said Patrick, his face showing a mixture of disappointment and sulkiness. ‘Number 42,’ he added, knowing he’d fucked up any chance of shagging Kirsty.

Now, after another heavy drinking session on Sunday evening, his head was pounding. He couldn’t face work. Every Tom, Dick and bloody Harry that didn’t have to work today would descend on the store. In menswear he’d be inundated with customers and their irritating questions. Have you got this in a blue? Or in a larger size? Can you go and check in the stock room, again? He owed the bookie on the corner over five hundred pounds and now had to use another one nearer the town centre. He went to the window and looked down to the street below. It was empty except for a jogger passing with an overweight black Labrador lagging behind. The sky was grey and large raindrops were starting to block out the view. His decision was made. Going back to bed was certainly more appealing than venturing out on a grey, wet Monday morning. He picked up his mobile and phoned in sick.

In the cosmetics department an attractive blonde lady was arguing with Kirsty. ‘This gold compact was only bought last week. Just look at the state of it now,’ she shouted, her well-manicured hand pointing to the cracked mirror.

Kirsty took the compact from her and cast her eye over it, inspecting the exterior casing. She then turned her attention to the interior noting the crack in the mirror and the sharp edges. ‘Ah,’ she said, noticing that the hinge had come unstuck. ‘I see the problem.’

‘Any fool can see the problem,’ said the woman, her face paling in anger. ‘May I remind you that this is a top brand compact? It is a disgrace that a designer item should not last a week. So *what* are you going to do about it?’

Kirsty put the compact on the counter. ‘Of course we will change it for you, madam. It is the policy of Carrington’s to replace items.’

‘Well I want this compact for a special event on Tuesday.’

Kirsty, gritting her teeth tightly, kept a fixed smile on her face. ‘If you’ll excuse me, madam, I’ll see if we have another one on display.’ She went over to the corner shelf and searched through the items. There was nothing there. ‘Oh fuck,’ she whispered to herself as she returned to the counter. If only, she thought, she had gone on her break earlier. The coffee and chocolate brownie she was looking forward to in the canteen now seemed a long way off. She looked again at the broken mirror on the compact. ‘No problem, madam. If we have one in stock you can take it home with you today.’

‘What do you mean *if* you have one in stock?’ said the woman, her face taking on a furious expression.

Kirsty moved to the till, put on her glasses and keyed in the code for the compact. She looked at the message on the screen – out of stock. She met the customer’s eyes. ‘I’m afraid, madam, the compact is not in stock. But we do have one in silver.’

‘Silver! What good is that? It has to be gold.’

‘Well, I can order one for you and it will be here tomorrow.’

The woman raised a well plucked eyebrow. ‘I suppose that will have to do.’

Kirsty pushed her glasses further up the bridge of her nose with her finger and switched her attention to the screen. 'Can I have your name, madam?'

'Celia Langridge.'

'And your phone number?'

'21847381.'

'Right,' said Kirsty, 'the compact will be here in the morning.'

The customer held Kirsty in a piercing stare that sent shivers down her spine. 'If my order does not arrive in time then heads will roll. And I can assure you I will create real trouble for this store.'

Kirsty's neck turned pink. But her thoughts were on the coffee and chocolate brownie waiting for her in the canteen.

At 12 o'clock William and John Gray sat at a corner table in the dining room at the Talbot Hotel. Gray cut into his steak and watched as the blood ran on to the plate. 'Now that,' he said, 'is what I call a great piece of meat,' placing a slice in his mouth and washing it down with a sip of claret.

'Yes, an excellent restaurant this,' replied William, glancing at the rare meat on Gray's plate and thinking a good vet could have that animal up on its feet in no time.

'So,' said Gray, 'from what I saw this morning the store looks pretty healthy. Figures for Carrington's are good all round.'

William spread his chilli across the rice and took a mouthful. He immediately felt the back of his throat burn as he swallowed. It was much spicier than he liked.

Gray looked up. 'Is everything all right with your meal, Patterson?'

'Yes,' said William, feeling as if his mouth was on fire. Now did not seem the time to return his meal and make a fuss. He took small mouthfuls with plenty of rice to cushion the burning effect. He then attracted the attention of the waiter. 'A jug of iced water, please.'

Gray glanced up and grinned. 'Too hot for you? You look a bit pink in the face.'

'No not at all. It's just quite warm in here.' He looked round the crowded room where every table was now taken.

Gray continued to grin displaying several gold fillings in his teeth. 'Not on the change are you, Patterson? Not menopausal I hope?'

William was starting to feel quite irritated by him, especially when he kept referring to him as Patterson.

Gray put down his knife and fork and pushed his plate away. 'So,' he said. 'How's the family?'

'Fine. Our daughter is now married and living out in Canada.'

'I see. So just the two of you?'

'Yes. That's right.'

'How is Helen coping? Empty nest. And all that?'

'She's fine. Actually she's got a job.'

'Excellent. Best thing she can do to fill the time.'

'Yes,' added William, trying to sound enthusiastic.

'You know it can be hard on the little woman. They spend all those years pandering to the needs of others. Then suddenly they are faced with a huge vacuum.'

‘That’s right,’ said William, wishing he would mind his own bloody business.

‘So, what type of work is she going to do exactly?’

‘Legal. Well a sort of PA with a legal firm. She actually has a law degree but never used it.’

‘Ah. Gave up her career to look after you, did she?’ he said, looking round and waving to the waiter. ‘Fancy a coffee, Patterson?’

‘No, I’m fine with the water thanks.’ His throat was still smarting from the kick of the chilli. The thought of hot coffee seemed like torture.

When his coffee arrived Gray added sugar and stirred. He placed the teaspoon on the saucer making a couple of clinking sounds. He looked at William and smirked. ‘You still look red around the gills, old boy. Are you sure you’re alright?’

‘Yes. Fine,’ he replied. How he wished he was sunning himself on a beach in Tenerife. Blast Helen and her job, he thought. Blast John Gray. Blast Carrington’s.

Gray emptied the last dregs of his coffee cup and replaced it on the saucer. ‘Bloody good meal that,’ he said.

William glanced at his watch. ‘Well, I’d better get back to that store of mine.’ He got up from his chair and put his napkin on the table.

‘Just a moment,’ said Gray. He gestured for William to sit down. He lowered his voice. ‘Bit of news on the grapevine. And this is strictly between the two of us. There’s a meeting at Head Office tomorrow. Talk about a possible takeover and some stores closing.’

‘Closing!’ said William, his face creasing into a frown. ‘Do we know which ones?’

‘No. And as I said nothing’s been decided yet.’

‘I see. But why, if we are doing so well, would they close some stores?’

‘Pure economics, old boy.’ He put his elbows on the table and rubbed his hands together. ‘Overheads of each store are tremendous. Selling off some properties and amalgamating others saves money in the long term. If the takeover goes ahead it will mean changes. And Carrington’s has always looked ahead.’

‘Right,’ replied William. He felt uncomfortable in his chair and moved closer to the table.

Gray lowered his voice again. ‘And don’t forget that competition is stiff in the retail trade. All these new budget clothes stores opening on the high streets have extremely competitive prices.’

‘Should I be worried?’ asked William, his voice now almost in a whisper.

‘Look, Patterson. I really don’t know any more than you do at this moment. But, if I’m being honest I imagine that the larger stores are safe.’

‘And mine? Is that likely to close?’

‘No idea,’ he said, standing up and smoothing a crease out of his jacket with his hand. ‘Well I must be off. More stores to visit.’ He shook William’s hand firmly. ‘Thanks again for the lunch.’

William ordered a coffee and sat alone at the table. His throat, still raw from the hot chilli, did not bother him anymore. He now had bigger things to worry about.

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3.

Helen stared up at the large glass building that housed the offices of Barker, Barker, and Slater. She took a couple of deep breaths to calm the butterflies that seemed, at this moment, to be flapping furiously in her stomach. She made her way in through the revolving door and approached the reception desk.

The girl behind the counter smiled as she looked up. 'Can I help you?'

'Yes. I'm starting work in the legal department today.'

'Name?'

'Helen Patterson.'

The girl picked up a list in front of her and ran a red varnished nail down it. Helen noticed the girl's ginger hair. Its frizzy texture seemed to have a life of its own and was scrunched up and secured at the back with a large brown clip. It had, she thought, on this occasion won the battle. But only just.

The girl glanced up. 'Take the lift to the third floor, turn left, second room on the left.'

She made her way into the lift and was just about to press the button when a well-dressed man caught the door with his hand and stepped in.

'Good morning,' said Helen. He nodded, and then concentrated on studying his reflection in the mirror and smoothing down his dark hair. He was, she thought, in his thirties, wore a dark blue suit and had well-manicured nails.

The lift stopped at the third floor. He followed her out. She turned left and counted the glass doors until she reached the offices of Barker, Barker and Slater.

He followed her into the large open plan area and made his way to an office in the far corner, nodding occasionally to people on the way.

‘Can I help you?’ said a young girl at the front desk.

‘I’m Helen Patterson. I’m starting work here this morning. PA to someone called Simon.’

She noticed the girl’s expression change slightly. ‘Ah yes,’ she said. ‘I’ll take you along to his office.’

She was led to the corner office where the man in the lift had gone. The girl turned. ‘Just knock and go in.’

Helen knocked on the door.

‘Come in,’ shouted a loud booming voice.

She entered. He was studying papers on his desk. He eventually looked up. ‘Yes.’

‘Hello again,’ she said. ‘We met in the lift.’

‘What?’ he said, pushing the papers aside.

‘I was just saying we travelled up in the lift together.’ She held out her hand ‘I’m Helen Patterson, your new PA.’

‘Right,’ he said, shaking her hand across the desk in a brusque manner. ‘You’ll find your office next door.’ He pointed with his finger to the room on his left.

‘You’ll be expected to take minutes at the staff meeting at ten this morning. Ring the Grange Hotel and book a table for lunch for four. That’s a window table of course.’

‘What time?’ she asked, taking a notepad from her bag.

‘12.00. No, on second thoughts, make it 12.30.’

‘Right,’ she said.

He looked at his watch. ‘What about a coffee?’

‘Yes, that would be lovely.’

He frowned. ‘Machine down the corridor,’ he said, slanting his head in a left movement. ‘Black. Two sugars.’

‘Ah yes of course.’ Feeling embarrassed by the misunderstanding, she retreated to her office to hang up her coat. The office was full of overflowing files and loose papers on the desk. The typewriter was not a type she had seen before. This, she thought, is going to be very different to serving soup to the elderly at the community centre.

She made her way down the corridor and put two coins in the vending machine and watched as the hot coffee hissed into the cup below. Her heart was thumping as she thought of the day ahead – taking minutes at the meeting, mastering the unfamiliar typewriter and filing system, coming to terms with the pile of papers left on her desk. She could have now been sunning herself on a beach or swimming in the pool. Suddenly Tenerife seemed very inviting.

Margaret had overslept and was hurriedly wiping her mother’s feet on a towel.

‘Mother, keep still. I can’t dry your feet if you insist on wriggling.’

‘That’s right. Blame it on me,’ said Grace Haddock, kicking the towel away and scowling.

‘Mother! For God’s sake keep still. I’ll be late for work at this rate,’ she said, leaning forward as she rubbed cream into the hard skin on Grace’s feet. She then helped her on with her slacks. ‘Right, there we are,’ she said. ‘Let’s get you

into your chair.’ She helped the old lady into the seat and wheeled the chair to the window. She always noticed her mother’s expression, when not pleased, resembled that of a bloodhound with sagging wrinkles and heavy eyes.

From inside the semi-detached house Grace looked out over the small gravelled garden and watched the passing traffic on the busy main road. A group of schoolgirls were passing wearing the royal blue blazers of the local secondary modern. ‘Good God those skirts couldn’t get much shorter. They might as well parade in just their knickers. I don’t know what their parents are thinking of letting them flaunt their bodies in that way.’ She sighed as she turned away from the window and glanced round the living room where Margaret was clearing away the bowl of soapy water.

‘Well,’ she sighed, ‘another bloody long day ahead.’

‘Oh mother, don’t start. I do my best.’

‘Well your best is not good enough if you ask me.’

‘But you have the day centre today. That’s something to look forward to. Isn’t it?’

‘*That’s something to look forward to,*’ mimicked Grace. ‘Not with all those old farts for company it’s not.’

‘But there are hobbies to get involved with.’

‘Who wants bloody basket weaving? Or painting? I might as well stay here and watch the telly.’

‘But mother you get depressed if you spend all day on your own. You know you do.’ Margaret ate the remainder of her toast and put the plate in the sink. She then took out her mother’s curlers and put the comb through her hair.

‘Ouch. Be careful with that comb. You nearly scalped me.’

‘Oh, mother. I was being very gentle.’

Margaret watched Grace staring at her and knew what was coming next.

‘And, by the way, what time did you get in after that silver wedding do?’

‘About midnight.’

‘Midnight!’

‘What on earth were you doing until that hour?’

‘I stayed for the disco.’

‘Disco! Good God. Discos are for young people. Who’d dance with you?’

‘Well,’ said Margaret, buttoning up her coat, ‘as a matter of fact there were people of all ages there. And these days you don’t have to be asked to dance. You just get up and do your own thing.’

‘Just as well, if you ask me. Or you’d have been sat on your own all night.’

‘Thank you, mother.’

‘Did you get drunk and make an arse of yourself?’

‘Why should I do that?’

‘Because you always do. One sniff of the cork and you go mad.’

Grace looked at the clock and smiled. ‘It’s a quarter to eight. You’re going to be late if you don’t shift yourself.’

‘Oh Lord,’ said Margaret. She placed the cereal packet in the cupboard. Then, as she was closing the cupboard door, she saw the bottle of wine on the shelf. Tonight, when Grace was in bed, it would be waiting for her – like an old friend.

Celia Langridge lay soaking in the corner bath of her en-suite thinking about the day ahead. At least, she thought, reaching for the soap, the weekend is over. Those two long days when families relax, young singletons meet friends, the tired re-charge their batteries, and the lonely feel even lonelier. She climbed out of the bath and dried herself on a towel. It felt soft against her skin. She put on her robe and looked in the mirror, examining her face for any new lines with her fingers. Not bad, she thought, for someone not quite fifty. The apartment, built over two levels, was divided by a spiral staircase, by which she made her way down to the kitchen. The argument in the store was quite an adventure and the surge of power she felt when shouting at the sales assistant resulted in a high that lasted well into the evening. The kettle switched itself off with a click and she poured the water into a china pot. After waiting a few moments she sipped her first cup of the day.

The telephone suddenly rang and made her jump. She picked it up.
‘Celia Langridge.’
‘Celia darling. It’s Verity. Just thought I’d give you a bell nice and early. I hope I haven’t disturbed you.’

‘No I was just enjoying a cup of tea.’

‘Jolly good. We’re really looking forward to seeing you tomorrow.’

‘Well it’s not every day my Godson gets married.’

‘Quite,’ said Verity. ‘The thing is I know I promised you a seat in the family car but it now turns out that Auntie Phyllis is useless on her legs. She’ll need ferrying back and to. Can you possibly make your own way to the church?’

Celia paused and took a deep breath. ‘Yes, of course.’

‘Oh you are a real brick darling. Now I’ve also seated you next to Auntie Phyllis. She’s gone quite deaf but I know you’ll look after her. You don’t mind, do you?’

Celia raised her eyes to the ceiling. ‘No, of course I don’t mind.’

‘Excellent. Look must dash. Loads to do. See you tomorrow. Bye.’

Celia slammed down the receiver. ‘Bitch, bitch, bitch,’ she screamed. ‘Why me?’ She placed her cup and saucer in the dishwasher and closed the door with a heavy thud. ‘Oh yes,’ she shouted, ‘I can hear the conversation now. Poor old Celia dumped by her husband for a younger model. A bit of a burden now she’s not part of a couple. No place for a spare skirt.’

She got dressed in a navy suit and went out to the car park. She would drive straight to Carrington’s. In her bag was the broken compact. She smiled and a feeling of power ran through her. Another day. Another battle.

It was 5pm at the offices of Barker, Barker, and Slater, as Helen looked at the huge pile of work on her desk. Her face was flushed and her ankles were starting to swell from walking up and down the building. She had not yet done the minutes from the staff meeting, filed the backlog correspondence, learnt how to properly cope with the typewriter, or had a cup of tea since her morning break.

Simon popped his head round the door. ‘I’m off to a meeting at Green and Hastings. I won’t be back.’

‘Fine,’ she said. ‘I’m just going to catch up on my work before I go.’

Not listening he shut the door behind him.

Through the glass partition she watched him walk down the long office. She went to the vending machine and put two coins in the slot and selected a strong black coffee. Nothing happened. 'Bloody hell,' she shouted, and kicked the machine hard with her foot. It suddenly purred into action and she watched with delight as the coffee poured into the cup below. She took the drink back to her office and sipped it slowly, feeling the caffeine hit and revive her system. She spent the next two hours catching up on all the work that needed doing. It was 7.30 when she pulled into the drive at Church Close. William was sat at the kitchen table reading his newspaper. He looked up. 'Is this what life's going to be like from now on? You do realise the time do you?'

'Yes,' she replied. 'I stayed behind to catch up on my work.'

'I see,' he said, turning to the sports page and folding the broadsheet in two.

'I thought it a good idea to get up to date so that I can start tomorrow afresh.'

He put his newspaper down on the table. 'What's for dinner? I'm starving.'

'The fridge and freezer are full of ready meals. I did tell you yesterday.'

She poured herself a glass of red wine then picked up the paper and sat at the kitchen table.

'What are you doing now?'

'I'm having a drink and am going to read the paper. I need time to unwind.'

'But what about dinner?'

‘Oh for God’s sake, William. Surely you can help yourself to one of the meals. They are all labelled and have cooking instructions on the front.’

‘I see,’ he said. ‘So I have to do it myself do I?’

She picked up the newspaper and read the headlines. ‘Once I get into the job I will no doubt be home earlier.’

He pulled open the fridge door and looked through the selection of neatly packed meals. He picked out a lasagne and put on his glasses to read the instructions. He put the dish under the grill. A few minutes he took hold of the dish but it was hot and he dropped it on the floor. ‘Christ Almighty!’ he shouted, as he stared down at the cracked dish and the contents of the meal sprawled across the kitchen floor. ‘Now look what you’ve made me do. I don’t see why I should put up with this. A wife should be at home not out messing about in some office.’

Helen fetched a cloth and started to mop up the lasagne.

He stepped back. ‘I doubt if that stain will come out of those tiles. Damn expensive they were too.’

She stood up with the cloth in her hand. ‘This isn’t just about dinner, is it? It’s the fact that you can’t stand the idea of me going out to work.’

He glared at her. ‘You don’t need to work. I earn enough for both of us.’

‘But I’ve told you before. That’s not the point, William.’

‘You’d better refresh my memory. What *is* the bloody point?’ he said, stepping aside to avoid putting his foot in the lasagne.

She rinsed out the cloth under the tap and threw it on the draining board with a thud. ‘The point is that I need some purpose in my life. A reason to get up in the morning. I’m bored with just being a company wife with only a few

charity events to attend. I've stirred soup, baked cakes, and organised enough bloody raffles over the years. Now it's time to do something for me.'

'Well you ungrateful bitch,' he said, putting on his coat and struggling with one of the sleeves that had turned inside out. 'You can stuff your bloody meals. I'm going to the pub to get damn well pissed.' He slammed the door behind him. The kitchen was suddenly silent. She poured herself another glass of wine and drank it slowly feeling the alcohol relax her body. After the previous eleven hours her legs ached, her ankles were swollen, and her head was bursting with new information. She was now more determined than ever to create a successful career for herself.

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4.

William opened his eyes and squinted at the sun shining through the blinds in the spare bedroom. He went to turn over but his head felt like a lead weight. Last night's session at the Fox and Bear had caught up with him. And the so-called special of the day – a great earthenware pot of steak and kidney pie, that by the appearance of the pastry topping could have felled a twenty-stone-prop-forward, now sat heavily in his churning stomach. He sat up and swung his legs to the floor and tripped on a silver wedding present still wrapped in its ornate paper. He noticed the clock. 'Christ, it's ten.' He went to their bedroom. The bed was made, the curtains opened. Helen had gone to work.

He made his way down the stairs to the kitchen and switched on the percolator, hoping a cup of strong coffee would bring him back to the land of the living. On the table was the invitation to Henry's wedding. He'd had little to do with Verity's brood over the years, but did remember Henry as an over-confident smart arse who was now something big in the city. As he drank his coffee he felt no better and breakfast in his present state of hangover was not something he could contemplate. He took a shower, dressed, and picked up his mobile and keyed in a number. It rang several times before being answered.

'Carrington's store. Tracey speaking. How may I help you?' The voice was polite and professional but, away from the phone, William knew she screeched like a parrot.

'Morning. It's Mr Patterson. Can you put me through to Toby Benson please?'

‘Yes certainly, Mr Patterson. Just one moment. I’m connecting you now.’

There was a click and he heard Toby’s voice. ‘Yes, boss. What can I do for you?’

‘Toby, I’m attending the wedding I told you about. I’m aiming to get away after the service. Skip the reception.’

‘No need if you want to stay. Everything’s taken care of this end.’

William switched the phone to his other ear and poured another coffee with his free hand. ‘The thing is I don’t want to stay. Can you ring me on my mobile about one o’clock? Make something up about a crisis?’

Toby laughed. ‘That bad, eh?’

‘Something like that. Let’s just say the sooner I get away the better.’

‘Okay, boss. Speak to you later.’

William put the invitation in his pocket and set off to St Mary’s Church.

In the cosmetics department two young girls sampled the perfumes, spraying different ones on their wrists and sniffing. Unaware that store detective Donna was watching them they continued sampling the perfumes. But her years of experience in security had taught her to keep a distance and mingle with the shoppers. At five foot ten and dressed in a navy suit she moved unnoticed with the crowds. She occasionally stopped to look at displays and pick up the odd item. The girls moved away from the cosmetics counter but the smaller of the two kept a bottle of perfume in her hand. Donna edged closer as they headed towards the exit. The adrenaline began to flow. She quickened her pace to keep

up. The girls were within sight of the revolving doors. But just before they reached the exit one of the girls stopped and put the bottle of perfume on the glove counter before leaving the building. Donna watched them through the glass as they crossed the street and entered a coffee shop. This time it was an aborted mission. No hand on the shoulder. No chase along the street. No telephone call to the police. But there would be many more opportunities for that buzz of excitement that made her job worthwhile.

William set off for the wedding. He was unfamiliar with the area and missed the turning and found himself on the ring road. He tried to double back but got stuck in heavy traffic. He got to Saint Mary's church at the last minute and parked his Jaguar in a side street. He rushed inside and an usher, a pimply young boy with greasy hair, showed him to a seat near the end of a row. The packed church was decorated with pink and white flowers. He listened to the organist playing a selection of pieces, his hands pushing and pulling the various knobs and his feet moving effortlessly across the pedals. Verity then made her entrance in a calf-length navy dress and a large hat. William smiled and was thinking it resembled a bowl of fruit when he heard footsteps and a lady sat down beside him. No sooner had she sat down than the organist broke into a rendition of the "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" and the bride and her father walked along the aisle.

'I cut that a bit fine,' said the woman. 'Taxi didn't turn up.'

He turned and smiled politely. 'I'm William Patterson, by the way.'

'Celia Langridge,' she replied, shaking his hand.

William looked at his watch a few times during the service. It seemed to be dragging on.

Celia stifled a laugh.

He looked at her and noticed her lovely complexion and pale blue eyes.

‘Have I missed the punch line?’

‘I’m afraid I’ve just noticed Verity’s hat.’

‘Ah yes,’ he said. ‘The Carmen Miranda concoction.’

They laughed.

Eventually they stood as the bride and groom emerged from the vestry and walked along the aisle. Outside the church as photographs were being taken William was just turning to set off when she touched his arm. ‘I know this is very forward of me but could you possibly give me a lift to the reception?’

He paused. ‘Er yes,’ unable to think of a decent excuse quickly enough. They walked to his car and he held open the door for her.

He drove the Jaguar along the country lanes until reaching the Grange Hotel. ‘Here we are,’ he said, as they pulled into the car park.

‘That was very kind of you, William. Now we must have a stroll in the gardens after the meal.’

‘Well actually’

‘I must insist you see the gardens. They are bound to be glorious at this time of year.’

‘Yes, I’m sure you’re right,’ he said. ‘But I can’t confess to being much of a gardener myself.’

‘Well in that case I shall educate you.’

His mobile suddenly rang. He took it out of his pocket. ‘Hello,’ he said.

‘Boss its Toby. Bit of a crisis, here. You’d better make tracks.’

He looked at Celia. She really did have the most attractive pale blue eyes.

He put the phone to his other ear. ‘Toby, I’m sure you can deal with it. I’ll see you tomorrow.’

‘I do hope that wasn’t anything important,’ she said.

‘No not at all,’ he replied, locking the car.

‘Come on,’ she said, ‘I’m starving.’

He followed her into the hotel. Work for once, he thought, will have to wait.

An hour before lock up time Toby did an inspection of the store. The day had been fairly uneventful, but in a week, with the sales starting the place would be inundated with throngs of customers. Tomorrow morning the boss was holding a meeting for the heads of departments which would set the wheels in motion.

He was just turning the corner and going past the stock room when he saw Kirsty approaching. She smiled. ‘Hello, Mr Benson.’

He felt himself redden. ‘Hello, Kirsty. How are you today?’

‘I’m fine. I’m making preparations for the sales at the moment. Just off to check the stock on some items.’

‘Good girl. I wish all our staff were so keen.’ He noticed her lovely slim figure and today she was dressed in a simple black dress. He decided to take the plunge. ‘I hope you don’t mind me asking you this but I was wondering if you’d like to go’

‘Wotcha!’ shouted Margaret, as she came along the corridor and joined them. ‘What are you two up to?’

‘Nothing,’ said Toby. ‘Just discussing the sales.’

Margaret turned to Kirsty. ‘I hope this young man has not been bothering you?’

‘Not at all,’ said Kirsty.

‘He’s a bit shy with the ladies you know.’

Toby felt himself blush. He was furious. This woman was doing it again. He had just been about to ask Kirsty out and it had all been ruined.

Margaret grinned. ‘I’m just on my way back to the canteen. Kirsty you can walk back with me. Bring me up to date with what’s going on in your department.’

He watched the two women chatting as they went off down the corridor and disappeared out of sight. He took a few moments to regain his composure. He’d had enough of that stupid bitch. He would certainly find a way of getting his own back on Margaret.

Donna applied red lipstick and studied her reflection in the mirror on her locker door. She’d get home early and surprise Bobbie. In her shopping bag she had two sirloin steaks and a bottle of red wine. They would have a nice evening watching television and then go to bed and make love. It had been a long time. Bobbie seemed pre-occupied these days. It was as if her mind was elsewhere. She had changed so much from the lovable girl she’d been when they met at

Valentines Club two years ago. She was the one with the elfin hair and black dress sitting at the bar twirling the cherry on a stick in her cocktail.

Donna walked to her car and drove the two miles home. She looked up at the third storey apartment and saw lights on. She climbed the stairs and put her key in the door. 'Only me,' she shouted.

The living room was untidy. Bobbie had never learnt to clear away her things. She went to the kitchen, put the steaks in the fridge and started to uncork the bottle of wine.

'You're very quiet,' she shouted. There was no reply. Obviously Bobbie was playing hard to get. 'I'm coming to get you,' she shouted. 'I hope you're undressed and ready for me. Otherwise I'll have to punish you.' There was no reply.

'I'm coming in now. If you continue to be bad I'll have to tie you to the bed and deal with you.' Donna took the two glasses and opened the bedroom door. 'Here I come.' But the glasses fell to the floor as she was greeted by the sight of Bobbie and another woman hurriedly getting dressed. The woman, more of a girl, pulled her dress over her naked body. Her dark hair was tousled and untidy.

Donna retreated to the kitchen. Her heart was racing frantically. She thought she was going to be sick but after leaning on the unit and taking several deep breaths it passed. The woman ran across the living room carrying her underwear and shoes, and disappeared out of the front door.

A few moments later Bobbie appeared. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I'm really sorry. I didn't want you to find out this way.'

‘So, did you have a better way? A note? Or did you just think about leaving without saying anything?’

‘No, of course not. I just couldn’t find the right moment to tell you.’

‘So? How long has this been going on?’

‘Three months.’

‘I see.’

‘Look I really am sorry

But Donna turned and brought her hand across Bobbie’s face.’

Bobbie swayed and touched her lip that was bleeding.

‘You deceiving little bitch,’ shouted Donna. ‘Just get out. You can call for your things when I’m at work. I don’t ever want to see you again.’

As Toby descended the main stairs he stopped on the landing and looked out over the street below. The evening light was starting to fade and car headlights shone brightly. He watched a group of people waiting to cross the road. He spotted a familiar figure. Reg Perkins stood out from the crowd with his six foot three frame. Even in mufti he adopted the security man pose – his erect figure looking both ways before guiding the small group of people around him across the road. Toby laughed as he watched the performance. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned round.

‘Fuck me, Patrick. You scared the shit out of me.’

‘So, what were you smiling at?’

‘That bloody pillock, Reg. He’s just been doing his sergeant major impersonation at the crossing.’

‘Ah yes,’ said Patrick, looking out of the window. ‘Get ready to salute. Reg Perkins is entering the building.’

The two men walked down the stairs together. ‘So,’ said Patrick, ‘Seen anything of Margaret? You certainly looked cosy sitting next to her at the party.’

‘No. And don’t start.’

Patrick lowered his voice to a whisper as he moved to one side to let a couple of shoppers pass by. ‘So you’re not going back for more?’

‘Not bloody likely. It’s not as if she’s in the first flush of youth’

‘She’s the same age as you.’

‘Don’t remind me. The thought is depressing.’

‘Well,’ replied Patrick, setting off on his way to menswear. ‘Let me know if you change your mind. I could always fix you up.’

Toby grimaced. ‘Not even if she was the last woman on earth.’

In the security office Reg studied the picture of the naked girl in his locker. She was draped across a sofa in a seductive pose. Her skin was tanned and her large firm breasts were exposed for him to admire. She had, he thought, a look of freedom about her. But, he knew, she was a bad girl who needed punishing. The office door opened and Toby walked in. Reg quickly slammed the locker shut.

‘Evening,’ said Toby, looking round the small room with numerous monitors beaming out black and white pictures of store locations.

‘Evening, Mr Benson. Is there a problem?’

‘No. Just to remind you the sales are starting next week. So things will be pretty hectic in the store.’

‘Well, that won’t be a problem. I’ll be well prepared.’

‘Good.’

Toby glanced at the screens. ‘Very impressive, Reg. You have so much technology at your fingertips. This really is the nerve centre.’

Reg pulled his white peaked cap further over his forehead and clicked his heels. ‘As I said, Mr Benson. I’ll be well prepared.’

An hour later, when the building was empty and the staff had gone home, Reg shone his torch in the direction of the kitchen department as he went on his first inspection of the night. He walked military-style through the interconnecting departments, stopping occasionally to light up an area for a clearer view.

Satisfied that all was in order, he returned to his office. He took out his flask and poured himself a cup of coffee and ate one of his ham sandwiches. He ignored the no smoking sign and lit a cigarette. He picked up the evening newspaper, turning to the sports page. His eyes felt heavy and he found it was impossible to keep the lids open. He was soon fast asleep. The *Evening Chronicle* fell to the floor and so did his cigarette which started to smoulder. With his head now lolled to one side at an awkward angle his snoring increased. He didn’t hear the alarm bell ringing.

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5.

William was awoken from a deep sleep by the ringing of the telephone. He picked it up and squinted as he turned on the bedside lamp. 'Patterson,' he said, his mind still in the no man's land between sleep and full consciousness.

'Boss, its Toby. There's been a fire at the store. Nothing disastrous. It was all contained in one room. But I thought you ought to know.'

'Fire!' shouted William, his brain suddenly alert. 'Where was it?'

Toby cleared his throat with a cough. 'It started in the security room.'

'So what the hell was Reg doing? He's paid to keep the store safe at night.'

'It appears he was on his rounds when a paper fell on the electric fire in his office.'

'I see. So what's the damage?' he asked, placing a pillow behind him and leaning back.

'Very little. One wall looks a bit black, but everything seems to have survived. We've been damn lucky, particularly with all that equipment in there. It could easily have spread to the whole floor.'

'I presume the fire brigade turned up?'

'Yes. There within minutes. But by that time Reg had the situation under control. Used the fire extinguisher and put out the flames damn quick.'

'Thank God for that.'

'Seems Reg has been a bit of a hero.'

'So where is he now?'

'Clearing up the mess. He's going to dispose of that electric fire as well.'

‘I’m on my way now.’

‘No need. Like I said I just wanted you to know.’

‘I’ll need a full report in the morning.’

‘Okay, boss. Good night.’

William replaced the receiver and leaned back. His heart was beating fast and his mind was racing – full of images of what might have happened to Carrington’s. The stock wiped out. Reports in the local Press. He glanced round the spare room where he’d taken refuge since the row with Helen. The job was taking her attention away from the house. Away from him. She was getting in at ridiculously late hours. She was even bringing work home with her in the black briefcase that now accompanied her everywhere.

He didn’t like the spare room. The bed was not as comfortable as the one in the main bedroom. The mattress was soft and sagged in the middle which gave him back ache. The curtains, unlike the rich velvet ones in their room, were unlined and let in the street lights. And Helen’s charity boxes were still piled in the corner. He picked up the newspaper from the bedside cabinet and glanced at the crossword. Now he made sense of the unsolved clues and completed it in a few minutes. He switched off the lamp, lay down and closed his eyes.

He thought of Henry’s wedding and Verity’s enormous fruit cocktail hat. It had been a wonderful day. The sun had been shining from a blue sky as Celia had taken his arm and led him round the grounds. She’d explained the garden layout with its sweeping lawns, lake and numerous beds. She even knew all the Latin names for the wild flowers as they’d taken the narrow path through the adjoining woods – leaving the crowds far behind. She had, for whatever reason, made him feel young again – instead of the tired old man he felt he had become.

He thought again of her twinkling pale blue eyes and clear complexion before he fell asleep.

‘I presume you know you’ll be accompanying me on the London trip next week?’ said Simon, standing in the doorway of Helen’s office.

She looked up and frowned. ‘Er, no. I didn’t. And why London?’ she asked, noticing that today he was wearing bright red braces over a pale blue shirt.

‘The Johnson case. It’s now taking place in the London court.’

‘I see. So what day are we going?’

He moved closer into the doorway to let a blonde haired secretary pass with a tray of cups.

‘Look,’ he said, his voice raised impatiently and glancing at his watch. ‘You’re the PA. Not me.’ He placed some papers on her in-tray and turned to go. He stopped in the doorway. ‘If you want the details go and see Judy in accounts.’ He shut the door behind him.

She pulled a face as she saw him swaggering along the corridor. She opened the cabinet and took out the Johnson file and leafed through the details of the case. The Johnsons, having divorced, were fighting over the custody of their daughter, Anneli. Mrs Johnson was moving back to Yorkshire. But Mr Johnson, a successful merchant banker, objected to his daughter being taken away. He wanted her to stay in London and be educated there.

She made her way down the corridor to the accounts office. The room was small with one desk. A silver haired woman working on a ledger putting figures into columns. She looked up. ‘Can I help you?’

‘I’m Helen Patterson, PA to Simon. I believe you have some details for me about next week’s London trip?’

‘Yes, I do.’ She reached into a drawer and flicked through some papers. ‘Here we are.’ She slid the envelope across the desk. Helen opened it and saw that she was booked on a flight to Heathrow on Monday evening. But she frowned as she looked through the remaining paperwork.

‘Something wrong?’ said Judy, glancing up from her ledger.

‘Yes. There’s no return flight details.’

‘It’s open ended. These court cases have a habit of over-running.’

‘I see.’

Judy smiled. ‘Just make the most of it. Away from the office with two eligible hunks.’

‘Two?’

‘Yes. Gerry will be there. He works from the London office.’ She took off her glasses and placed them on the desk. ‘God it’s been a long morning. Fancy a cuppa?’

‘That would be lovely,’ said Helen, sitting down.

‘You haven’t tasted it yet,’ she said, opening the door to the small kitchen and switching on the kettle.

‘Well I’m sure it will be better than that vending machine.’

‘Christ,’ she shouted, from the kitchen. ‘You’ve not been drinking that weasel piss have you?’

‘Well yes. Simon told me to use it. So it’s become a routine. But I must admit I’ve tasted better.’

‘God! You poor soul. Mind you there are many people in this building that would gladly piss in Simon’s coffee.’ She placed two mugs on the desk.

‘There you go.’

Helen took a sip. ‘Now that’s what I call a decent cup.’

Judy leaned back in her chair. ‘So, how’s the job going?’

‘Chaotic, I’m afraid. I just hope things start to change.’

‘Well don’t expect Simon to change. He’s a complete shit and will step on anyone who gets in his way. But you will have discovered that already.’

‘I have. So what’s this Gerry like?’

‘Much nicer. A real gentleman. He’s a senior partner.’

‘And he works in London you say?’

‘That’s right.’

Helen sat back in her chair and relaxed. ‘I’ve been so busy learning this job I’ve hardly had time to catch my breath.’

Judy smiled. ‘It’ll get better. Just give it time.’

‘I was so keen to return to full time employment.’

‘Empty nest?’

‘Yes. And I now realise I should have done it years ago.’

Judy drained the last dregs of her tea. ‘Look, there’s never a right time. It’s difficult whichever way we women choose.’

Helen glanced at her watch and sighed. ‘I must get back.’

‘*Mein Fuhrer* beckons?’

‘Something like that,’ she said, getting up.

Judy watched her. ‘Look, when you return from your trip pop in and let me know how it went. You know – gossip, shenanigans.’

Helen laughed. 'I can assure you there will be no shenanigans from me. But yes I'll pop in.' She walked back up the corridor to her office and placed the airline ticket in her bag. The conversation with Judy had raised her spirits. However, the trip with Simon filled her with trepidation. And even worse, how would William react when she told him she'd be in London with two gentlemen for an undisclosed period?

The staff canteen was busy serving breakfasts. Reg moved along with his tray looking at the cooked food on the sizzling hot plates. Margaret piled the bacon high on Reg's plate and added a couple of extra fried eggs. She grinned. 'Not often I get to serve a brave hero.'

'It was nothing. Only doing my job,' he said, as he put the plate on his tray.

'A bit more than the call of duty I'd say. I'm not sure I'd act as fast if one of my gas ovens blew up.'

He winked as he placed his cup beneath the tea machine. 'All part of a day's work, darling.'

She laughed then turned to Bessie on the till. 'No charge today for our hero.'

Bessie looked up over the top of her glasses and waved Reg through.

He saluted and took a seat at a corner table. There he made his usual sandwich from the bacon and egg and added tomato ketchup. He bit into the thick wedge of bread and egg yolk escaped, running down his jumper. He wiped it with a napkin, but the yellow stain remained.

Patrick came over to his table and held out his hand. 'I believe congratulations are in order. A little bird tells me you saved the store last night.'

Reg put down his sandwich and shook Patrick's hand. 'Only doing my job, squire. Quick reactions,' he said, a smug expression appearing on his face. 'I've been in the security business long enough not to panic.'

'Very well done,' said Patrick, slapping him on the back.

Reg was finding it difficult to hide his pleasure in his new found fame. He hadn't felt so good in a long time. Yes, he thought, my quick thinking did save the store. And, by moving the remains of the cigarette, no one will ever suspect that was the culprit.

Later, Reg left the building with his head held high. He walked purposefully along the pavement and turned left down South Street to the Brinfield area. Twenty minutes later he turned into Garner Road where his ground floor flat came into view. He made his way down the concrete path and placed his key in the shabby door that had not seen a coat of paint for many years. In the kitchen he took a mug out of the dirty pots piled in the sink and rinsed it before making a cup of tea.

He opened his newspaper and, with a feeling of excitement, he turned to page three. The young blonde, no more than eighteen he thought, was leaning against a tree with her arms stretched above her head holding on to branches. Her pouting lips offered a come and get me look, and her large breasts, definitely a 38D, stood to attention in the bright light of the sun. He got his scissors and cut out the picture and pinned it on the wall of the spare bedroom with all the others.

He drank his tea slowly as he did his daily inspection of all the exhibits on the wall. But his favourites were those girls he'd photographed himself, local girls with an air of innocence about them and unaware they were being snapped. Each new girl would be placed on the wall. It was his secret collection. But today he was too exhausted to spend long looking at them. He lay on his bed and slipped into a deep sleep.

Celia entered the cosmetic department and approached Kirsty at the counter.

'Good morning. I've come to collect my gold compact.'

'I'm afraid the new one has not yet arrived,' said Kirsty. 'The delivery is due any minute, madam. I do apologise.'

Celia paused. 'Not a problem. I'll call in tomorrow.'

'Thank you, Mrs Langridge. That is very good of you. I'll keep it here under the counter so that it is ready for you when you return.'

'That's fine.'

Celia knew her mood had been on a high since meeting William. Henry's wedding had been a lovely occasion. It was a day when she hadn't once felt lonely. Now she took a short cut through the stationery department and went up in the lift to the top floor. Across the sea of faces in the Palm restaurant she spotted a hand waving.

'Over here,' cried Verity, from a corner table. She patted the seat next to her and Celia sat down, taking off her bolero top and placing it on the chair back.

'Now,' said Verity, 'what are you having? I can recommend the cheesecake.'

'Just a black coffee for me, thank you.'

‘Don’t tell me you’re on another diet.’

‘I try to stick to three meals a day.’

‘No snacks?’ replied Verity, taking a fork to her lemon cheesecake and putting a large piece in her mouth.

‘I don’t have snacks.’

‘Good God. I must say I envy your self-discipline.’

‘It’s just common sense. If I eat too much I put on weight and that makes me unhappy. It’s as simple as that.’

‘So how are you my dear? I must say you’ve got a twinkle in your eye today.’

‘Pretty good. And I certainly enjoyed Henry’s wedding.’

‘Yes, it went off very well. And he’s the last one to fly the nest,’ she said, raising her hand to attract the waitress. ‘Can we have two more coffees over here, please?’

‘Does it make you sad? Losing the last one.’

‘God, no. I’ve wiped too many backsides in my time. Now I’ll concentrate on me.’

‘Wiping your own backside?’

Verity laughed. ‘That’s right.’

Celia looked round the restaurant. Light shone through the skylights and reflected off the bald head of the old gentleman playing on the corner piano. His fingers moved across the keyboard very professionally. Occasionally he glanced up at diners and smiled. She moved to one side as the waitress put the two coffees on the table. She stirred her coffee and then resting the cup between her palms sipped it slowly.

Verity pushed her empty plate to one side and leaned back in her chair.

‘Something about you seems different. What have you been up to?’

Celia felt her face turn pink. ‘Nothing. I’m just starting to get over the divorce. You know – move forward.’

‘Oh, sweetheart, that’s wonderful. I’ve been so worried about you.’

‘Well, these things take time. I didn’t know what I was going to do with the rest of my life when I was ditched for a younger model. It has taken a bit of getting used to. Waking up alone. Going to bed alone.’

‘Darling, it must have been dreadful for you.’

Celia put down her cup. ‘Actually I’ve met someone really nice, Verity.’

‘Oh my dear. How wonderful. So come on, who is it?’

She touched her nose and grinned. ‘Let’s just say its early days. So I’m keeping things to myself for the moment.’

‘Oh you are such a bitch at times.’

‘I know. Annoying, isn’t it?’

‘Well, whoever it is, I wish you luck,’ said Verity, adding more sugar to her coffee. ‘I hope you’ve forgiven me for putting you with Auntie Phyllis.’

‘No problem. In fact, once I got talking to her I discovered she had quite a sense of humour.’

‘So she had her hearing aid switched on then?’

‘She did once I’d worked out how to tune it in.’

The waitress appeared with a jug of coffee but Celia waved her hand to decline another cup. ‘I’m afraid I’ll have to dash, Verity. I’ve got an appointment with the optician in fifteen minutes.’

‘That’s a shame I thought we might stay for lunch while we were here.’

‘Perhaps another time,’ she said, kissing Verity lightly on the cheek. She made her way down in the lift. Two young girls were chatting. An older couple, laden with carrier bags, stared blankly ahead.

‘Ground floor,’ announced the lift attendant, her small frame neatly dressed in a navy suit.

Celia stood aside for the older couple to get past and then walked to the front door and out onto the street, where she joined the throngs of shoppers moving along the pavement. She felt as if she was walking on air. William had been so attentive to her, flirtatious and funny. She was, she thought, after all the months of misery, starting to feel like a woman once more.

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6.

Toby sat at the boardroom table preparing for the meeting ahead. It would be a chance to see Kirsty up close. The thought of her long slim legs was at times too much to bear. What he wouldn't give to have her in his bed. Maybe soon he'd get her on her own and ask her out.

Patrick came in and sat down. 'Watcha,' he said, getting out a notebook and pen and putting them on the table. He squinted. He got up and shut the blinds.

Toby looked at his watch. The thought of the meeting ahead irritated him because he had so many other jobs to be getting on with. As assistant manager the responsibility fell heavy on his shoulders. It was he who was responsible for shielding William from much of the small stuff that happened in the day to day running of the store.

He was just opening his file when the door opened and Margaret entered, pushing a trolley. 'Morning, boys,' she said. 'Here are some refreshments for you.' She manoeuvred the trolley with flasks of coffee and tea into the corner and helped herself to a biscuit.

'Oi!' shouted Patrick. 'Those are meant for us.'

'Tough,' she said. 'I was here early today preparing this lot for you. So, I deserve first pick.'

'Pass them over then,' he said.

She put the plate of biscuits in the centre of the table. He leaned over to take one. She slapped his hand. 'Naughty! You'll have to wait until the meeting starts.'

‘Or else?’ he said.

‘Or else you’ll get a smacked bottom young man.’

‘Ooh Margaret. Fancy you suggesting such a thing in front of my friend here. He’s such an innocent young boy.’

Toby felt himself redden. ‘‘Not that innocent,’ he replied, through gritted teeth. ‘I’ve had my moments I can assure you.’

Margaret laughed as she put a white tablecloth on a small side table and set out the pale blue cups and saucers. ‘Leave the man alone. He can’t help it if he’s a late starter. Not cheeky like you.’

A few minutes later William entered the room followed by Kirsty, Donna, and Penny from ladies’ fashion.

William sat down and opened his leather covered notebook.

‘Now,’ he said, looking round the table. ‘We need a quick briefing before the sales start on Monday. Kirsty, can you bring me up to speed on your section?’

Toby watched as she put on her glasses and opened the file in front of her.

‘Okay,’ she said, ‘both sun tan oil and moisturiser have done very well as you’d expect throughout the summer months.’

‘But now?’ cut in William.

‘Now we need to shift any remaining stock before the winter sets in?’

‘Anything else?’

‘Yes, make up has sold pretty well. It would be a good time to reduce some of the designer labels. That always proves popular.’

William wrote notes on his pad and then looked up.

‘Patrick. What about menswear?’

‘We are reducing substantially the off-the-peg suits we’ve got left.’

‘And?’ interrupted William, getting up to pour himself a coffee.

‘I’m going to promote the shirt and tie packs. Customers see them as particularly good value. They went down really well last time.’

‘Good.’

Toby was looking at Kirsty’s hands. They were soft and smooth. He longed to reach out and touch them across the table. He suddenly felt a dig in the ribs from Patrick. He looked up to see William staring at him.

‘Toby, I was asking if you had any subjects you wanted to add before we have coffee.’

‘Er no. Not at the moment.’

He whispered to Patrick as they waited their turn for a drink. ‘Thanks for nudging me. It could have been really embarrassing.’

‘What were you looking at?’

‘Kirsty’s legs. Absolutely magnificent.’

‘I know. If I was given the chance I’d be up her like a rat up a drain.’

Donna held up the queue, having got tea instead of coffee. Patrick sighed. ‘If she doesn’t hurry up all those chocolate biscuits will be gone.’

‘Don’t you think about anything else but food?’

‘Yes. Sex,’ he whispered. ‘And talking about sex it seems that Margaret is paying you a lot of attention lately. What did she call you? A late starter. How sweet.’

‘Just shut it.’

‘Oops. Have I hit a nerve?’

‘I’d never make a move on her. Not if she was the last woman left in the world.’

William sat down again at the table and stirred his coffee.

‘So Donna, are you all geared up for the sales? This is a busy time for you.’

She put down her cup. ‘Yes once the store gets congested it is harder to spot a thief. But as I’ve said before nothing much gets past me.’

Patrick raised an eyebrow and whispered to Toby. ‘That dyke is built like a prop forward. I can’t imagine anything getting past her.’

‘Right,’ said William, ‘now we’ve all got drinks let’s get on.’ He passed round the sales reports from the previous six months. If you turn to page three I’ll talk you through the figures.’

Reg, having found it impossible to sleep for longer than two hours, got out of bed and dressed. He made himself a mug of tea and glanced out of the small kitchen window onto the back yard. Large weeds appeared between the gaps of the slabs. Something moved to his left and he saw the tabby cat perched on the brick wall that divided his property from next door. It was licking its paws, its rough tongue reaching between the claws with great precision. Reg banged on the window. It didn’t move and, after stopping to stare at him, continued the cleaning process. Reg threw open the back door, picked up a stone and aimed it at the cat. ‘Piss off you mange ridden flea bag,’ he shouted. But the cat had been too quick for him and jumped off the wall and disappeared from sight. He drank the remainder of his tea and put the mug in the sink. In the fridge he found

some cheese and made sandwiches. He put them in his rucksack along with his camera.

It was a ten minute walk to the park. He walked past the bandstand which was quiet on weekdays, reserved for Sunday afternoon concerts, took a diversion through the path at the back of the café and skirted along the play area. He then climbed up the steep bank and settled on a bench. He sat for quite a while until girls from local offices appeared in their lunch breaks. He had got to recognise many of them, but today a new girl joined them. She had long dark hair and, from what Reg could see, an ample pair of breasts which stretched the thin material of her white top. He manoeuvred his tiny camera lens onto the girl and pressed the zoom button. The breasts, on closer inspection, were definitely a 36 cup. He longed to touch them. He waited until he could see her pretty face and clicked. He continued to watch her as he ate his cheese sandwiches and poured tea from a flask. This one was definitely different to the other girls. Later, when he got home, he'd develop the photograph and, if it showed her breasts to their full potential, it would join all the others on his spare bedroom wall.

Margaret waved to her mother in the living room window as she arrived home from work. When she got into the room she saw the cross expression on Grace's face. 'What's up?'

'I've had an accident?'

'Don't worry I'll get you some clean pants.'

'No,' said Grace. 'I've knocked your plant off the window ledge. I've told you so many times it should have been put somewhere safe.'

Margaret leaned across her mother and examined the damage. The pot was cracked and soil had spilled out onto the carpet. 'Well we've as much chance of reviving it as water going back up the tap.'

'I knew someone once that had water going back up their tap.'

'Who?'

'Auntie Irma. But the water got stuck and exploded.'

'Oh mother. Aunt Irma had frozen pipes. It was during that bad winter we had.'

Grace pouted and pulled her cardigan around her. 'What's for tea? I'm bloody starving.'

'Shepherd's pie. I only need to heat it up in the microwave.'

'But I had shepherd's pie at lunchtime.'

'From Meals on Wheels?'

'No,' she cried, raising her eyes to the ceiling and letting out a sigh. 'I found one on the front lawn.'

'Well it's too late to defrost anything else. How about I put some onion chutney on it. You know, liven it up a bit.'

'Don't put too much on. The last time I had that chutney it made me fart something dreadful. And real stinkers they were too.'

It was ten o'clock when Margaret returned to the lounge after putting Grace to bed. She put her feet up on the red stool and looked at the evening paper. There was a piece on page two about the fire at Carrington's. She put on her glasses and read the details.

Security Man saves Store from Fire

A security man last night saved Carrington's store from a fire that could have destroyed the building. Reg Perkins (56) extinguished the fire that was thought to have started in a security office. Fire service officers said that the quick thinking of the security man saved the store. Carrington's sale is due to start next week. Store manager, William Patterson, said business would be as usual.

Margaret switched off the television and thought about her day. It was no different than yesterday. And tomorrow, no doubt, would be identical. She'd serve up the same meals to the familiar old faces. There was, she knew, no escape while her mother was still alive. She wondered where all her dreams had gone. None of the items on her wish list had been crossed off. She went to the kitchen and opened the pantry door. There sat a bottle of red wine. She uncorked it and poured herself a glass. It tasted superb, and she knew that several glasses later she would sink into a place where her wish list didn't matter.

Helen switched off the television after the news and stretched her arms above her head.

'Drink?' she said.

‘Yes. I’ll have a cognac, please,’ said William, peering over his glasses as he folded his newspaper neatly and put it on the coffee table.

She got up, opened the cabinet and poured out the drinks. ‘There you go,’ she said, handing him a glass.

He swirled the cognac in the glass and then held it up. ‘Cheers.’

‘Yes, cheers,’ she said.

He sipped his drink and then leaned back in his chair. ‘You know the sale starts on Monday? God, they seem to come round so quickly these days.’

‘So,’ she said, tucking her legs beneath her and getting into a more comfortable position. ‘I presume the crowds will turn up in force?’

‘Let’s hope so. Otherwise we’ll be left with a massive amount of unwanted stock on our hands.’

‘I’m sure that won’t happen,’ she replied, draining the last drops of her cognac.

‘Anyway, next week I’ll be late home most nights so don’t prepare any special meals. I’ll eat at the store.’

‘Actually,’ she said, getting up to refill her glass, ‘I won’t be here.’

‘Why?’

‘I’ll be in London on business.’

‘I see. So how long will you be away?’

‘I don’t actually know. It’s difficult to gauge these cases.’

‘But how long do you think, roughly?’ he added.

‘I really don’t know, William. I doubt it will run to a week.’

‘For Christ’s sake. You can’t expect me to put up with you swanning off to London alone.’

‘But I won’t be alone. I’ll be with two partners. Simon and Gerry.’

‘And that’s supposed to make it alright is it?’

She threw her arms up in the air. ‘Why can’t you accept that I want and need this job? And don’t forget I supported you in your career over the years.’

He got up and walked to the door.

‘Where are you going?’ she shouted.

‘To bed.’

‘Go on, walk away from the situation. That’s your solution to everything.’

He turned and met her eyes. ‘If it’s any consolation I miss you being around. But don’t think I’m giving in to you over this damn job.’ He slammed the door behind him and she heard his footsteps on the stairs.

‘Damn!’ she sighed. Her knuckles were white as she gripped the drinks cabinet in rage. Why for once, she thought, can’t he be pleased for me? She took deep breaths and fought back the tears as she poured herself another cognac. Perhaps, she thought, London doesn’t seem such a bad idea after all.’

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7.

William watched from the first floor balcony as the front doors of the store were unlocked. A large crowd had gathered outside for the start of the sale. There would be those looking for a bargain. The chance of a designer outfit or a dinner service at half price. It was also an opportunity for the store to rid itself of end of season stock and increase figures.

As the doors opened shoppers immediately surged into the store, dispersing into different directions. William saw several making for the escalator to the first floor. He was just about to turn and head to his office when he spotted a familiar figure in a navy pin striped suit coming through the front entrance. Only John Gray, the area manager from Hell, he thought, could arrive at the start of the sales. William watched him in the midst of the crowds looking at the sale items on counters and racks. Standing out by his height, he took in every detail as he strutted along the aisle. He then looked up and spotted William on the balcony and raised his eyebrows in recognition.

‘Christ,’ sighed William. ‘What the hell does that bastard want now? And why choose today of all days?’

Gray stepped off the escalator with his hand outstretched. ‘Morning, Patterson.’

‘Morning,’ said William, shaking hands.

‘Your office,’ he said, turning military style and walking ahead along the corridor. Once inside the office he placed his briefcase on the desk with a loud thud. ‘So, I won’t beat about the bush. And this is in the strictest confidence, Patterson.’

‘I see,’ said William, suddenly feeling a tightening in his stomach.

‘There’s been another meeting of directors.’

‘About which stores are to close?’

‘No. But it seems definite that Carrington’s will be taken over.’

‘By whom?’

‘The American company. Rightways.’

‘But they are a bargain basement sort of place,’ said William.

‘Carrington’s is far superior to them.’

Gray took a seat. ‘The voting resulted in a stalemate.’

‘So you’re saying there will be no takeover?’

‘No. I’m not saying that.’

‘But surely they can’t go ahead with a takeover if they didn’t get enough votes.’

Gray gestured with his hand for William to sit at his desk. ‘I’m afraid this is not the case. It’s more complicated.’

‘How?’

‘The outcome was very close. It means, in theory, it can go to another vote. And, in the meantime, arms can be twisted to change minds.’

William took in a sharp breath. He could feel beads of sweat on his forehead. ‘So, in your opinion, do you think Carrington’s days are numbered?’

‘I think,’ he said, crossing his legs and brushing a piece of fluff off his immaculate suit, ‘that is most likely the case.’

William stood up and went to the window. Below he could see customers leaving the store with numerous carrier bags bearing the Carrington’s green and white logo. He turned. ‘What happens as far as staff is concerned?’

‘Well *if*, and I stress *if* this store remains open – because you know some will close?’

‘Yes. You mentioned that last time we met.’

‘So, as I was saying. *If* this store remains open then there will be some redundancies.’

‘I see. And dare I ask,’ replied William, his voice now raised in anger, ‘where do I fit into all this?’

‘To be perfectly honest, Patterson,’ his voice now taking on an air of authority, ‘I don’t know. Some managers will be kept on. Others will go.’

‘It sounds like Russian roulette if you ask me.’

‘No. Certainly not. Every case will be looked at on its individual merit.’

‘Individual merit?’

‘Age, experience etc.’ He picked up his briefcase, ‘I must get on. Lots more visits to make.’

William felt irritated by the smug expression on Gray’s face. He seemed to be enjoying playing God. Deciding who would go and who would stay. ‘I’ll see you to the stairs.’ They walked along the corridor in silence then made their way through the shoppers to the escalator. Gray held out his hand. ‘I’ll be in touch, Patterson.’

William watched him descend to the ground floor and exit the front door. He returned to his office. He felt a tightening pain in his chest. This had happened a few times recently, and the stress was not helping. He took an indigestion tablet and sucked it slowly. The thought of losing his job filled him with trepidation. If this takeover went through then Carrington’s would become just another branch of this American chain, which specialised in fast and cheap

merchandise. He had to talk to someone. But with Helen away he had no one to turn to.

Helen unpacked her suitcase in the London hotel, placing her navy suit on a solid wooden hanger in the wardrobe. The accommodation was on the sixth floor. The room had a large double bed, a desk to work at, and an en-suite. She opened the window and sat on the sill and looked across at Hyde Park with its great expanse of lawns and trees. Several people were strolling along the pavement – out for an evening walk or on their way for a meal. She breathed in the air and watched the traffic passing below. She wondered if she'd have any time to venture to a gallery or museum.

Suddenly the phone rang and made her jump. She picked it up. 'Helen Patterson.'

'It's me,' said Simon, with his usual habit of not bothering to introduce himself by name.

'Yes, Simon. What can I do for you?'

'My bloody luggage has still not turned up. That's all I need with a busy week ahead. Christ these airlines need a bullet up them at times.'

'Oh dear,' said Helen, suddenly smiling to herself at a vision of him turning up in court in his vest and underpants.

'I'm absolutely furious. They haven't heard the last of this matter,' he said, his voice rising several decibels.

'Well I'm sure there are some stores still open. You'd better go and buy a few items in case the luggage doesn't arrive later.'

‘My thoughts exactly. Look, we are supposed to be meeting Gerry in the bar at 8.30 and then having dinner. You’ll have to do the honours until I get back.’

‘No problem. See you later. Bye.’

She realised, having replaced the receiver, she didn’t know what Gerry looked like. She guessed that with being a senior partner he’d be in his fifties. She took another look at the view out of the window and then showered and washed her hair.

Damn bus, thought Margaret. Why can’t they ever run on time? Having waited twenty minutes at the depot for the number 32, which didn’t arrive, she had taken a 43 to Moulton Grange and walked the last half mile home. Her legs felt heavy as she pushed open the gate, and putting the two heavy shopping bags on the step she struggled to find her key in her handbag.

‘Hello mother,’ she shouted, as she made her way to the kitchen and put the carrier bags on the work surface. ‘Sorry I’m late. Bus didn’t turn up. I don’t know how they get away with running such a poor service.’ She put the tinned items in a top cupboard and fresh items in the fridge. Then filled the kettle and switched it on. ‘We’ll have a nice cuppa. Then I’ll start tea. Fish tonight.’ She put tea bags in the pot. ‘You’re very quiet mother. Not speaking tonight?’ she said, as she opened the lounge door.

‘Oh my God,’ she cried, as she saw Grace on the floor. ‘Mother, what happened?’ But Grace did not answer. Margaret looked at her mother on the floor. Her face was pale. The upturned wheelchair lay a few feet away. She put

the wheelchair upright and tried to lift Grace into it. But the old lady was too heavy. 'Oh God,' cried Margaret. Tears filled her eyes as she placed a rug across the lifeless figure. 'Oh mother, please don't die. I'm so sorry I was late home. Please, please don't die.'

She went to the hall and picked up the telephone. Her hands were shaking as she dialled 999. It seemed to ring for a long time. 'Oh come on,' she shouted. 'Somebody answer the bloody phone.' Eventually it was picked up by a female operator.

'Emergency'

Margaret interrupted. 'I need an ambulance. And I need it now.'

At 8.30 Helen descended the hotel staircase in a calf length black dress and single string of pearls. She made her way into the bar and sat on a stool. She looked round the room and there seemed to be only couples or young people. She sat watching the barman mixing all sorts of cocktails and then ordered a gin and tonic. A voice from behind said 'I'll get that.' He placed his hand gently on her shoulder. 'Helen, I presume? I'm Gerry. Sorry I'm a few minutes late.'

She shook hands and he perched himself on the stool next to her. He had distinguished silver hair, a confident manner and a very friendly smile. His grey suit was immaculate and she was glad she'd chosen her black dress for tonight.

He picked up the drinks and turned to her. 'Shall we?' he said, gesturing towards the dining room. 'I don't know about you but I'm starving.'

'Yes, I'm certainly hungry.' She followed him through to the dining room where chandeliers hung from the gold ceiling and long brown drapes swept

across the windows. It had at one time been very palatial, but was now slightly dated and faded. The waiter showed them to a table near the stage where a trio of young men played. They studied the menu and both chose the sole. Gerry ordered the wine and then turned to Helen. 'So,' he said, 'how are you finding the job?'

'Well I'm getting there,' she replied. 'I've been away from the work place for a number of years. I'm now realising I should have gone back earlier.'

'Ah yes. Hindsight is wonderful,' he said, moving to one side as the waiter arrived with their soup. 'But I'm sure you made the decision for the right reason at the time.'

'Yes, I was a stay at home mother. So I couldn't be in two places at once.'

'There you are then. I'm sure you were an excellent mother and now you're becoming a first class PA.'

'Thank you. I think my degree helps in many ways with the legal terms even though I've not used it properly before.'

'What degree did you do?'

'Law.'

'Really?'

'Yes, I studied in London. I had all sorts of plans for a career in place.'

'So what happened?'

'I got married and then pregnant almost straight away.'

He met her gaze and smiled. 'But there's nothing to stop you achieving that career now.'

She smoothed her hands on her napkin. 'To be honest I've never thought of doing it at this stage of my life.'

'Assumed it was too late?'

'Something like that.'

He put down his spoon and held her gaze. 'If I can arrange for the firm to take you on as a pupil would you be interested?'

'Yes,' she said. All thoughts of home and William's objections were now in the distance. This was a chance she could not let slip by.

'Just leave it with me,' he said. 'I'll take care of everything.'

The evening, for Helen, was turning out to be quite eventful. While Simon was out shopping for clothes she had somehow struck a deal for herself. After a lovely meal, good company and far too much wine she was feeling happy and mellow.

'What about you, Gerry? How did you start with the firm?'

He leaned back in his chair and drained the contents of his glass.

'Actually I was very lucky. My father was in the legal business and once I'd gained my degree he got me in with a top firm. It gave me a good start and many opportunities came my way. I've now ended up in charge of the London office.'

Helen felt very comfortable in Gerry's company. He was kind and considerate and yet somehow, she thought, underneath the confident manner, quite lonely. He ordered a bottle of champagne. 'I think tonight deserves celebrating. Don't you?'

'Yes. I'll drink to that,' she said, as they clinked glasses over the table.

The dining room was now crowded, several couples were dancing to the music. Gerry looked at the man on the double bass and smiled. 'I think he's

going to set that instrument on fire any minute,' he said, watching as the player spun it round and round to a jazz number. 'Let's dance,' he said.

They did a jive to the music. Gerry, she found, was very light on his feet and had extremely good co-ordination. He seemed to make everything such fun. For the next number the trio struck up a tango. He took a rose from one of the tables and put it between his teeth. He gave Helen a few lessons on the basic steps and she was soon into the rhythm of the dance – lurching backwards and forwards as the band played on. They moved together well. They swayed to the music and Gerry, still clenching the rose between his teeth, brought the dance to a climax when he lifted Helen up in the air and lay her across his bended knee. They made their way back to their table. Helen had not felt so relaxed for a long time. Her head was buzzing with the wine, the chance to advance her career, and the excitement of letting herself go on the dance floor.

But when they reached their table she was met by Simon's frozen face of disapproval. Gerry excused himself and disappeared in the direction of the gents' toilet. Helen, her face still flushed with excitement, sat down at the table.

Simon glared at her. 'What on earth do you think you're doing?'

'Gerry asked me to dance. I don't see any harm in that,' she replied, taking a sip of her wine.

'May I remind you that we are here to work? Not make exhibitions of ourselves. You really have taken one step too many tonight.'

'Oh,' she said. 'I thought my steps were in perfect harmony.'

'I don't wish to continue this conversation,' he said, getting up. But as he turned to leave Gerry appeared.

‘There you are, Simon. Bit of a bugger about your luggage going astray.

Did you manage to get kitted out in the shops?’

‘Yes. But had to buy an off the peg suit.’

‘Champion.’

‘Look’ said Simon. ‘We need to discuss the Johnson case before tomorrow.’

‘Yes. But not now. Helen and I are both tired after our dancing. Let’s have an early morning get together.’

‘Fine. If that suits you better,’ said Simon.

Helen noticed his face creasing into a deep frown. He liked getting his own way. But he’d been overruled.

He turned to go. ‘Shall we say 7am for the meeting?’

‘Yes, that’s fine,’ said Gerry. ‘But before you go I’ve been talking to this lovely lady here about her background. Did you know she had a law degree?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I didn’t know.’

‘Yes. And even more exciting news. I’m arranging for her to take up a studentship at the firm.’

Simon’s face froze. ‘When was all this arranged?’

‘Tonight. Somewhere between the main course and the tango.’ He winked at Helen. ‘Now look,’ said Gerry, ‘I’ll get off and see you both in the morning.’

Helen accompanied Simon in the lift to their floor. He said nothing on the way up but when they reached their floor he grabbed her arm sharply. ‘Don’t tell me you didn’t plan all this with Gerry.’

‘All what?’

‘About having a law degree. You’re making me look a right bloody fool.’

‘Well there was no need to mention it to you. I had no idea that I’d be offered the chance to use my degree.’

‘You haven’t got the studentship yet. And mark my words you won’t.’

‘What do you mean?’ she said, noticing his body had gone rigid.

‘What I mean is that I will put everything in your way to block this stupid idea.’

‘I see.’

‘No, I don’t think you do. I have a lot of power in the North West office. The only way you’ll advance from being a PA is over my dead body.’

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8.

William sat at his office desk working late on the sale figures. Apart from the occasional footsteps of Reg on his rounds there was the quietness and almost eerie feeling that only an empty store seemed to have. The staff had gone home and the customers departed for another day. However, the news of a possible takeover was racing through his mind and he could, he thought, be facing the end of his career. At fifty two, he wondered, where would he find another decent job? And financially it would be a disaster – the mortgage, hanging heavy on his shoulders, would make downsizing from the home he loved to a smaller property essential. He tried to put the thought out of his mind and concentrate on the figures.

An hour later he had finished working on the figures and put the files in his cabinet and locked the drawer. As he walked past the security room he saw Reg sitting at his desk eating a sandwich. He tapped on the door.

‘Evening,’ he said, stepping into the room.

‘Good evening,’ replied Reg, hastily putting his sandwich back in the tin and moving it out of sight behind a box on his desk.

William stared at the black and white screens on the monitors ‘Looks like everything is in control,’ he said. ‘Had any problems with the new equipment?’

Reg got out of his seat and stretched to his six foot three inch height. ‘Absolutely no problems, Mr Patterson. You can count on me to have this place running shipshape.’

‘Jolly good,’ said William. He took another look at the monitors that beamed pictures from each department. ‘Well I’ll leave everything in your capable hands then.’

He took the back entrance to the small yard where his car was parked. Driving home his mind went over the first day of the sales. The crowds had arrived early and the figures were up on last year, but would this make any difference to the takeover? This American firm with its cheap and cheerful philosophy would destroy Carrington’s image.

As he steered the car into Church Close and parked outside the house he felt a stabbing pain in his chest. ‘Bloody indigestion,’ he said. A young boy was skateboarding on the pavement, every so often putting one foot on the ground and pushing himself off to gain speed. William let himself in the front door placed his briefcase on the hall table and walked down the narrow corridor to the kitchen. He opened the fridge door but found he was out of beer. He lifted the lid of the freezer and glanced at the selection of meals. He picked up one and read the label. *Lasagne – a delicious, mouth-watering dish cooked to perfection especially for you.* He chose another one feeling the ice cold texture beneath his fingers – *Chicken Madras bringing the appetizing taste of the East straight to your door.* He let out a loud laugh. He doubted this chicken in its short life had been any further east than Bury-St-Edmunds. He threw it back in the freezer and placed the lasagne under the grill. As he waited the thoughts of his talk with John Gray came back into his thoughts. Carrington’s was his life. He had to talk to someone. He picked up the phone and dialled London. It rang several times before being picked up.

‘Bayswater Hotel.’

‘Good evening. Can you put me through to Helen Patterson’s room?’

‘One moment please.’ He heard a series of clicking sounds and then the operator’s voice returned. ‘I’m afraid Mrs Patterson is not in her room.’

‘I see,’ said William, his frown creating deep furrows on his forehead.

‘Would you like to leave a message, sir?’

William looked round the kitchen with its modern cream units and marble surfaces where so many family events had taken place. There had been birthday parties, brownie meetings, visiting grandparents. Now it seemed deadly silent.

‘Would you like to leave a message, sir?’ repeated the operator, interrupting his thoughts.

‘No thank you. Goodnight.’ He took out his diary from his breast pocket, looked up a number and dialled. It was picked up quickly. He heard a television in the background but the volume suddenly decreased.

‘Celia Langridge,’ said the soft tone at the other end of the telephone.

‘Ah, Celia. It’s William Patterson here.’

‘William. How lovely to hear from you.’

‘Look, I know it’s late but do you fancy having a drink and a quick bite somewhere?’

‘I’d love that, William,’ she said. ‘But how about you come here and I’ll prepare us a little something.’

‘That’s very kind of you.’

She cleared her throat. ‘I expect you are very tired after the start of the sales today.’

‘Yes, you could say that.’

‘Well come on over and we’ll have a long chat. Shall we say twenty minutes?’

He replaced the receiver and decided to go and have a quick shower. Just as he got to the kitchen door the smell of burning lasagne filled the air. He walked across and switched off the grill. Now the evening offered something to look forward to – food, drink and Celia’s company.

Donna entered the doors of the Fairview Nursing Home knowing the guilt she was feeling was justified. It was six weeks since she’d last visited. But the pressure of work was, she knew, no excuse. Fresh flowers in reception were carefully arranged in a tall glass vase as she walked along the red carpet through to the lounge. The old man in the high backed chair was engrossed in his newspaper but almost immediately looked up at her as if he’d somehow sensed her presence.

‘Hello, Dad. How are you?’ she said, stooping to kiss his cheek.

He closed his newspaper and placed it on the ground. ‘I’m fine. But you’re a bit of a stranger my girl.’ His white hair was tousled and he looked at her over his glasses. ‘How’s the girlfriend? Bobbie isn’t it?’

Donna busied herself pulling up a chair and noticed a grey haired lady in a corner seat had gone to sleep. Her knitting wool had fallen from her knee and the ball of pale blue wool had rolled a couple of feet towards the window. Donna sat down and adjusted the cushion at the back of her. ‘So where were we?’

‘I was asking about Bobbie.’

‘Ah,’ she said, avoiding his eyes.

‘Don’t tell me. Another partner hit the dust. So when did this happen?’

‘Quite recently.’

‘Oh Donna,’ he sighed, taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes.

‘When are you going to settle down? It’s bad enough that you choose women.

The shock killed your mother.’

‘For God’s sake, Dad. She died of lung cancer.’

‘That’s what I mean.’

‘Her lung cancer was caused by smoking too many cigarettes. Not me.’

He said nothing and looked at the sleeping lady. ‘She spends most of her time asleep. Only wakes up at mealtimes. Might as well be dead.’

Donna opened her bag and took out a crossword book and handed it to him. ‘I thought you’d like a new book of puzzles.’

He took the book and flicked through the pages. A smile crept over his face. ‘Thanks. The last one ran out a few days ago.’ He put the book in his jacket pocket. ‘So, what happened to Bobbie? I quite liked her’

‘Bloody cheated on me. The bitch.’

‘So, on your own now?’

‘That’s right.’

He crossed his legs and moved his body into a more comfortable position. ‘It broke your mother’s heart when she realised there was no prospect of grandchildren.’

‘Well I’m perfectly able to adopt.’

‘Yes. But you’d have to be in a stable relationship. And you’ve had a lot of partners over the years.’

She watched the old lady in the chair. She stirred slightly and the ball of wool rolled further away.

‘Don’t worry Dad. I’m sure I’ll meet someone nice soon.’

Margaret made her way along the hospital corridor to Ward 6. The smell of disinfectant lingered in the air. The walls, once painted cream, now resembled a faded nicotine shade.

She noticed another lady waiting by the office door. The woman turned and smiled. ‘Visiting a relative?’

‘That’s right,’ replied Margaret, checking her watch. ‘My mother’s just been admitted. Broken ankle and arm.’

‘Oh dear,’ replied the woman, checking her appearance in a compact mirror. She then put it in her bag and closed the clasp with a loud snap.

Margaret glanced at her watch again and sighed.

‘They keep you waiting and tell you nothing in these places,’ said the woman. ‘I’ve been visiting my mother here for weeks and I’m still no wiser. Oh by the way my name’s Sylvia.’

‘I’m Margaret Haddock.’

The woman laughed.

Margaret grimaced. ‘I know. Haddock is an awful name. I’ve always hated it.’

‘Oh, I wasn’t laughing at the name, Margaret. I’m amused by the coincidence.’

‘Coincidence?’

‘Yes, you see my surname is Cod.’

‘Blimey,’ replied Margaret. ‘So you’ve had to suffer teasing all your life as well.’

‘Yes. Always known as fish face.’

A nurse opened the office door. ‘You can go in now.’

Margaret waved at Grace as she approached the corner bed. ‘Hello mother,’ she said, placing a carrier bag on the bed. ‘You’re looking a bit better than earlier. You gave me a real fright when I got home.’

‘What’s in the bag?’ asked Grace grumpily.

‘Two clean nightdresses, a bar of soap and some grapes.’

Margaret settled down on a chair and helped herself to a grape.

‘Oi,’ shouted Grace, ‘leave them alone. They’re mine.’

‘I haven’t had any tea, mother.’

‘That’s not the point. If I’m going to be stuck in here with bugger all to do I might suddenly feel like a grape or two.’

Margaret glanced round the ward. Most of the patients were elderly women.

Grace placed her hand over her mouth and whispered. ‘See that woman opposite.’

Margaret looked up. ‘You mean the one in the pink nightdress?’

‘No. The one opposite with the tight perm. Blue bed jacket.’

‘Oh yes. I see her now.’

‘She’s never been the same since she had her piles done. Can’t sit in the same position for longer than five minutes.’

‘So what’s she in for this time?’

‘Two broken ankles. Fell down some steps in town.’

‘Poor soul,’ said Margaret.

‘She was snoring earlier. Sounds like a bloody train going through the ward. I won’t sleep a wink tonight.’

‘They’ll give you a sleeping pill.’

‘Yes. And a lot of bloody good that will be. I’ll be lying here all night listening to the clock ticking and that woman grunting like a bloody pig.’

Margaret glanced down the ward to where Sylvia was sitting with her mother. They didn’t appear to be saying very much.

Later, after kissing her mother goodbye, Margaret made her way out of the hospital gates and down the road to the bus stop. After a couple of minutes a car pulled up. The driver wound down the window.

‘Hi,’ said Sylvia. ‘Get in. I’ll give you a lift.’

Margaret climbed in and sank into the soft comfortable leather seat. ‘This is very nice,’ she said, admiring the upholstery.

‘Where to?’

‘Lilac Road. Hope it isn’t too far out of your way.’

‘Not at all,’ she said, moving the car into the lane of traffic.

‘It will seem strange,’ said Margaret. ‘Going home to an empty house.’

‘How long have you been looking after your mother?’ asked Sylvia, stopping at a red light.

‘About ten years now. Her health has been deteriorating for a while.’

‘And that must leave you very little time for yourself?’

‘That’s right. Most days I go to work, I come home to mother, and I go to bed.’

‘Well,’ said Sylvia, ‘my advice is to make the most of her spell in hospital. Think about yourself for a change. Believe me I know from experience how difficult it can be.’

‘So when is your mother being released?’

‘Tomorrow.’ Sylvia raised her eyes to the ceiling. ‘And so, all things considered, my freedom is over. For now at least.’

When they got to Lilac Road Margaret closed the car door behind her and waved as Sylvia drove off. As she put the key in the front door the sound of silence greeted her and she smiled. She had started off the evening feeling tired and harassed but ended it feeling completely liberated. Perhaps meeting Sylvia was a good omen. She made herself a cup of tea and picked up the newspaper, flicking through the first few pages until she settled on the entertainments page. The multiplex was showing several films. There was a special offer on at the local Hairdressing Salon. And a new Indian restaurant had opened in the shopping precinct. There were so many new things to consider. And now there was nothing to hold her back.

Celia, after taking William’s phone call, had arranged her hair into a loose knot, dabbed perfume behind each ear and changed into pale blue jeans and a cream silk shirt that clung to her slim frame. A cold buffet was laid on the table and a bottle of Chablis was chilling in the fridge. She took one last look at herself in the hall mirror before answering the door. Through the frosted glass she saw his tall, slim frame and felt a surge of excitement. She unlocked the door.

‘Hi,’ he said, handing her a bunch of red roses.

She put them to her nose. 'Oh William you shouldn't have. They are absolutely beautiful,' she said, making her way to the kitchen and filling a vase with water.

He stood in the doorway. 'I'm very grateful, Celia. I've had a pig of a day.'

'I rather gathered you had,' she said, putting the flowers one at a time in the vase, and then placing them on the window sill. She opened the fridge door. 'Wine?'

'Lovely,' he said, and watched as she poured the Chablis into two glasses. He took one and they clinked glasses.

'To future happiness,' she said. 'Now let's take our drinks through to the lounge and you can tell me all about your day.'

He followed her through to the sitting room and sank into one of the cream sofas.

She sat next to him and tucked her legs beneath her. 'Now,' she said. 'Stop me if I'm wrong, but I think it's more than tiredness from the sales isn't it?' She stayed quiet, sipping her drink, giving him time to speak.

He moved uncomfortably on his seat. 'Very astute of you.'

'I like to think I don't miss much,' she said, pushing a loose hair off her face.

He took a sip of his wine before speaking. 'Two things are bothering me,' he said, staring at the ground in front of him.

'Go on,' she said, softly.

'Firstly I've been getting these pains in my chest,' he said.

'And secondly?'

‘Well, I shouldn’t be discussing this with anyone but I know I can trust you to be discreet.’

‘Of course. I wouldn’t dream of repeating anything you tell me.’

‘It seems the store may be taken over.’

‘By whom?’

‘An American company that deal in a quick turnover of cheap stock.’

‘Oh lord. So where does that leave you?’

‘In deep shit. I’ll never get another job at my time of life.’

She sat close to him and stroked his arm softly. ‘No wonder you’re worried,’ she said. She filled his glass with more Chablis and replaced the bottle on the table. ‘Well, I can certainly help you with the first problem. I’ve a friend who is a heart specialist. I’ll get you an appointment ASAP. He’ll certainly sort you out.’

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘I really am grateful.’

‘That’s what friends are for,’ she said, stroking his face and kissing him on the cheek. She felt totally in charge of the situation. He was so easy to fall in love with. And the more vulnerable he was the easier it would be for him to return that love.

Donna looked at her feet soaking in the bowl. She touched the blister that had erupted on her heel and winced. Her calves were aching and she felt like an old woman. She sat back on the sofa and thought about her day. The first catch had been a young boy taking several pairs of socks and putting them in his jacket pocket. She’d waited until he was out of the building and then chased him along

the street. Experience had taught her to keep hold of thieves once she had grabbed them. This young man had tried to get away and kicked her on the shin. But she'd held on to his jacket and then placed his hands behind his back in a tight lock. The second catch was a frail old lady who'd picked up a handbag. Donna apprehended her on the pavement outside the store. There was no chase down the street and no argument. The old lady was passive and as Donna took her arm she was led back into the store.

Now as the evening descended Donna, still missing Bobbie, decided to go out for the night. Dressed in a white blouse and black trouser suit she drove into town and parked her car. She cut down the side alley from Slater Street and the Valentine Club came into sight. She could see the bright lights and hear the music thumping out. She entered through the door and went up the stairs to the bar.

The young girl behind the counter approached her. 'What can I get you?'

'I'll have a rum punch,' said Donna, making herself comfortable on one of the bar stools.

The girl mixed the drink and put the glass on the counter. 'Not seen you here before.'

'I used to come here quite a lot. But it's been a while now.'

She sipped her drink and took a look at those on the dance floor.

Flashing lights from above enhanced the atmosphere and reflected on the dancers and the tiled floor. She spotted a young girl at a table on her own. She wore a red dress that accentuated her slim body. Donna was just finishing her drink when she saw another woman approach the girl in the red dress and after chatting for a while they took to the dance floor.

‘Another drink?’ said the girl behind the bar.

‘Yes,’ said Donna.

After three drinks the rum was starting to kick in. But Donna couldn’t help noticing that she was the oldest woman in the club. Everyone looked so young and she felt out of place. The girl in the red dress was now smooching with her dancing partner. Everybody seemed to be having a good time. She finished her drink and left. It was a long time since she’d felt this lonely.

Reg kept his eye on the two eggs frying in the pan on the hob. He spooned over extra fat and watched as the whites started to become crisp and then slid them between two slices of thick buttered bread. As he ate his sandwich he stared out of the kitchen window. The sun was shining and he watched his neighbour Eric digging his vegetable patch. Eric’s short stature made him seem extra stocky and today, stripped down to his vest, he exposed several tattoos on his forearms. At that moment Eric stopped digging and leant on his spade and saw Reg in the window and waved. Reg opened the window and shouted, ‘I’d offer you a cuppa but I’m off out in a few minutes.’

‘No worries,’ he shouted back. ‘It’s too bloody hot for tea anyway.’

Reg closed the window and piled his pots in the sink. He placed his camera in his rucksack and walked to the park. Today he was earlier than usual as he entered through the iron gates and chose his position high above the grassy area that was partially hidden by the thick bushes. From here he had a good view of the area frequented by the office girls at lunchtime. He was impatient to see his favourite new girl. The previous snaps of her had come out well. She

had a cracking figure and an air of innocence about her. An innocence that he'd like to take away. He got out his camera and settled down. He didn't have to wait long. She was early and she was alone. He noted, through his zoom lens, the short sleeved white blouse she was wearing had only a three button fastening across her ample breasts. As she started to eat her sandwiches he clicked several times – catching her in different positions. But suddenly she was looking directly at him. A cross expression replaced her look of innocence. She started to approach him and he quickly put his camera in his rucksack. She got closer and glared. 'What do you think you're doing?' she said, meeting his gaze.

'Just trying out my new camera.'

'On me?'

He stood up.

'Do you make a habit of this?'

'Of what?' he said, starting to feel nervous at the questioning.

'Oh come on,' she said. 'Taking photographs of girls in the park. I think the police would be very interested to hear this.'

'No. Don't do that. Like I said I was just trying out my camera.' She was going to ruin everything. How dare she. He met her gaze with defiance.

'You won't go to the police young lady.'

'What makes you so sure?'

'Because,' he said, moving closer and towering over her. 'I can do all sorts of things to you that you wouldn't like. Really nasty things.'

She stepped back and lost her footing. She fell to the ground and struggled to get up.

He laughed. 'Not so brave now are you. You need a damn good hiding and I'm the person to do it.'

She was now on her feet. 'Get away from me you creepy bastard,' she shouted, and started to run along the hedged path towards the north exit. But Reg was closing in fast.

An hour later Eric had finished digging his vegetable patch and was drinking a cold beer. His vest was soaked in perspiration from labouring under the hot sun but he had a feeling of great satisfaction at having completed the job. He was just thinking of having another beer when Reg rushed along the road and went in his back door slamming it behind him. Eric stared at the door with the flaking paint. Oops, he thought, looks like Reg has been caught short. He sat on the fence looking at the freshly dug patch with the finely sieved soil and the pile of weeds in the corner. He fetched his wheelbarrow and shovelled the weeds into it. He then swept the narrow path with a thick bristled brush. He went inside and came out with two cans of beer. He stepped over the wooden fence between the houses and knocked at Reg's door. There was no reply so he pushed open the door and stepped into the kitchen.

'Are you there, Reg?' he shouted. 'There's a beer in the kitchen for you.' There was no reply so he walked through to the hall and poked his head round the sitting room door but the room was empty. He knocked on the bedroom door but was met with silence. He started to open the door to the spare bedroom and was just about to go in when he heard the running water. He

decided to leave Reg to his shower and left the beer on the kitchen table before letting himself out of the back door.

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9.

The private patient suite at St Mary's was in the east wing overlooking the rose garden. William glanced out of the waiting room window. A patient, that looked no more than forty, sat on one of the benches reading a book. His dressing gown was wrapped around his thin frame and his white feet were sat in brown leather slippers that looked a size too big. Despite the warm and friendly atmosphere of the private suite William felt nervous as he waited to go in.

Celia put her hand in his and squeezed. 'No need to feel worried. Mr Fielding is the best cardiologist I know.'

'How many do you know?' replied William, his attempt at a joke not disguising the anxiety he felt.

She laughed. 'Just the one. But believe me he knows his stuff.'

'I hope so,' he sighed, glancing again out of the window to the garden. The patient was still sitting on the bench but had now closed his book and was in conversation with a nurse in a royal blue uniform. She had settled on the seat beside him and was using her hands to reinforce some technical detail.

'Mr Patterson,' said a voice. William looked up to see a tall man with dark curly hair and an immaculate grey suit, offering his hand. 'I'm Mr Fielding. Please come into my office.' Once inside the small room the consultant gestured for William to take a seat. 'So,' he said, reading the notes before him. 'You've been having chest pains I believe?'

'That's right.'

'And how long exactly have they been troubling you?'

'About three months.'

‘Right,’ replied the consultant, making no comment and adding a note on the pad in front of him. ‘And lifestyle?’

‘In what sense?’

‘Healthy diet, exercise, stress?’

‘No, no and yes, I’m afraid.’

‘So,’ he said, taking a stethoscope off his desk and placing it round his neck. ‘Let’s take a look at you. Just pop behind the curtain, take off your shirt and lie on the bed.’

Celia sat reading a magazine in the waiting room. The models were, she thought, very thin. But clothes looked good on them. She flicked through the pages and an article caught her eye. *Dating in mid-life*. According to the story people were happier when someone new entered their lives. The middle years for those alone were, said the author, a time to be a little more adventurous, take chances, become the real you. She smiled to herself and sighed. ‘How true.’ She put the magazine back on the table and used the drinks machine in the corner of the room, inserting two coins and watching as the plastic cup dropped and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the air.

Meeting William had been the best thing to happen to her since her acrimonious divorce. There was meaning to her life once more. A reason to get up in the morning. There was someone to share her thoughts with. He didn’t know it yet but she would soon become the most important person in the world to him. She had decided they were going to be together and nothing would stand in her way.

A little later the office door opened and Mr Fielding shook hands with William.

William looked at Celia and raised his eyebrows. 'Let's go and have a drink and we can chat.' They walked along the corridor to the small restaurant and took a seat at a window table.

'Well? What did he say?' asked Celia.

'ECG was inconclusive. He wants to do more tests tomorrow to see if there are any blockages.' He looked at her face. 'I'm scared, Celia. Really scared.'

She stroked his face gently. 'William, if there is anything wrong he will find it. And it will all be fine.'

'I wish I had your optimistic nature.'

'He wants me here overnight. I'm not sure if he thinks I'll suddenly drop dead. Anyway I've brought nothing with me. Could you possibly go to my house and pick up some items?'

'Of course,' she said,

He smiled and squeezed her hand. 'I can't thank you enough for your kindness.'

She returned his smile and held on to his hand. The article is right, she thought. Mid-life is a time to be adventurous and take chances. And she would take a chance on William.

In the courtroom Helen watched the child custody case with great interest. The Jacksons, intent on scoring points against each other, were waging battle over the

custody of their daughter Anneli. Mrs Jackson, a slight woman, told the judge that a child needs to be with her mother. Mr Jackson, a tall, well-made man with a booming voice, found it difficult to hide his frustrations. He was insistent on his daughter being brought up in London. 'She needs,' he said, 'to be with her father who can provide a good home and education.' The judge, an elderly man with bushy eyebrows, peered over his glasses with what Helen thought was a look of great experience. This wise old judge was not going to be swayed either way by the couple and would, she thought, look at what was best for the child.

Now with an adjournment until the following day, Helen decided to see something of the city. Having changed into jeans and comfy shoes she left her hotel and headed along the Bayswater Road and cut through the park. The air was warm and after a while she found a bench to sit on. Today for the first time she felt like a tourist. Nearby a little boy with his father threw bread to the ducks. Several waddled up to him in the hope of food. Two of them found a crust at the same time and fought over it pulling it to and fro until it broke in two. Once they had satisfied themselves that there was no more food they waddled off to a couple sitting on the next bench who were taking their lunch out of a wicker basket. She saw the telephone box opposite and phoned home. There was no reply. She then rang her neighbour. The phone was picked up after three rings.

'Hello.'

'Hello Joyce. It's me Helen.'

'Helen how are you?'

'I'm fine. Can you do me a favour?'

'Yes of course.'

‘I’m in London with a court case and I can’t get hold of William. Can you put a note through his door to say the case has been delayed and I’ll not be home for another few days?’

‘Yes. I’ll do that. And enjoy your time in London.’

Later she visited the Victoria and Albert Museum. Numerous children were on school trips. Harassed teachers tried to keep control amid the noise and excitement. Once inside she joined a tour that took her through the textiles of the East. She then made her way along Knightsbridge and found a small coffee shop. She looked at the menu and ordered a coffee and a fruit scone. She settled into reading her magazine, flicking through the fashion pages and stopping at the horoscopes. Under Taurus, she saw she was edging into a new phase in her life and she must persevere with the changes. She smiled to herself. Then a voice made her jump.

‘I’m Aries. What’s in store for me?’

She looked up to see Gerry standing by her table. ‘Hello,’ she said.

‘Please do join me.’

He sat down opposite her. His eyes twinkled like those of a naughty school boy. ‘So,’ he said. ‘Don’t keep me in suspense. What’s going to happen to me?’

Helen ran her finger down the list. ‘Here we are,’ she said. ‘Oh dear.’

‘What?’ he said, raising his eyebrows.

‘It says that you are working too hard and need to create more relaxation in your life.’

He burst out laughing. ‘What a load of rubbish.’ He moved to one side as the waitress brought Helen’s coffee and scone. ‘I’ll have the same please,’ he said. He watched Helen stir her drink. ‘You don’t believe all this star sign nonsense, do you?’

‘No. But it doesn’t stop me looking.’

‘Which means you half believe it?’

‘Yes. I suppose so.’

He settled back in his chair. ‘Thought any more about the training?’

‘I’ve thought about little else.’

‘Excellent. And are you interested in any particular area of the law?’

‘Yes. This custody trial of the Jacksons has made me realise that I’d like to give women a voice. I know things have improved for women with feminism – more opportunities, equality, and so on.’

‘But?’ he said, taking the tray with his coffee and scone from the waitress and arranging the crockery on the table.

‘But I feel there is still a long way to go. The new rules of feminism are only the beginning. Attitudes take a long time to move forward.’

‘Well yes. Look at evolution. A million years is still considered a short period of time.’ He added sugar to his coffee and stirred. ‘So, has this child custody case made you want to follow family law?’

‘If I’m honest I think it’s just nudged what was already at the back of my mind to the foreground.’

He buttered his scone and took a bite. ‘What will your husband think about this move? I believe he’s in the department store business.’

‘Yes. Manager of Carrington’s.’ She wiped her mouth with a napkin.
‘William’s not been happy with me returning to full time work. He thinks a woman’s place is in the home.’

‘Seeing to his needs I presume?’

‘Yes. But I’m tired of all that. I’ve had it staying at home with just charity events for stimulation. Do I sound selfish for wanting more?’

‘Of course not.’

‘You see I want to make a difference to people. And I think I can improve lives through the law.’

He stared at her and smiled.

‘Oh dear. Now you are laughing at me.’

‘No I’m not laughing. I’m just admiring your determination.’

‘Thanks.’

‘But don’t expect it to be easy. It can be a jungle out there.’

‘Yes I know. I’ve already encountered Simon.’

He laughed. ‘I’ll tell you one thing.’

‘What’s that?’

‘I think you will make an excellent lawyer. I really do.’ He picked up his napkin and folded it neatly before placing it on the table. ‘And if you don’t take this opportunity you will regret it for the rest of your life.’

Donna flopped onto the sofa after a long day at the store. She felt like putting her feet up for the night and watching the television. But Verity was having one of her little soirees and she’d found it hard to refuse. At least she was ensured of a

decent meal. After taking a shower she opened the wardrobe and picked out a navy trouser suit with a crisp white blouse.

Thirty minutes later she pulled up at Verity's detached house in Sycamore Lane. She rang the bell and waited. The night was getting chilly and she pulled up the collar on her jacket. Through the frosted glass she saw a figure approaching. It turned half way down the hallway and shouted something. There followed several hoots of laughter. Verity opened the door still laughing with a glass of wine in her hand. 'Donna. Lovely to see you. Do come in.'

She stepped inside and gave Verity a kiss on the cheek.

Verity linked arms with her and led her to the lounge where guests were chatting. Some stood by the fireplace, others sat on the two large sofas. 'Now then everybody, this is a very good friend, Donna.' In turn they shook hands and introduced themselves and she was handed a glass of champagne.

Verity excused herself and went into the kitchen to check on the meal. Donna was talking to Tim, a dentist with a practice in the town, when the doorbell rang.

'Will someone get that,' shouted Verity.

'I'll go,' said Donna. She opened the door to see the most beautiful woman standing on the doorstep. About twenty five, long blonde hair, and a slim figure encased in a bright red sleeveless dress.

'Hello, I'm Sophia. And I'm late. I'm afraid the taxi driver and I got lost.'

'Hello, I'm Donna.' They shook hands and she felt the soft skin on the small hand she now held in her own.

‘I do hope I’ve not held up the meal. I really am hopeless when it comes to directions.’

‘Don’t worry. We’ve not started eating yet. But I can tell you there are some wonderful smells coming from the kitchen.’

Verity appeared in the hall. ‘Sophia, my dear. How lovely to see you. I see you’ve met Donna – now do come and meet the others. Donna, will you be an angel and put these napkins on the table for me?’

‘Sure.’ She opened the double doors to the dining room and admired the oval table decorated with a pink cloth and a centre piece of red roses. She started to put the napkins out and spotted the name tags attached to wire holders. She was placed between Tim the dentist and Clara the G.P. She quickly moved her name tag and put herself next to Sophia.

A little later as guests finished their soup Donna turned to Sophia.

‘So tell me,’ she said. ‘What line of business are you in?’

Sophia dabbed her lips with her napkin. ‘I’m a restorer of pictures.’

‘How interesting. So where do you do this restoring?’

‘Sometimes at the Arts Trust where I’m based in Heatherton. Or sometimes I go on site.’

‘On site?’

‘Yes. I go to wherever the pictures are. You see some of them are too delicate to move.’

Donna moved to one side as her fish course was placed in front of her.

‘Sophia, I am so glad that we are sitting together. You see I’ve always been

attracted to art. But, because I've never had any training in the area, feel at a loss at where to start.'

'Well,' she replied, accepting the tartar sauce handed to her by Tim, 'my advice would be to go to as many galleries and exhibitions as you can. That way you'll learn what you like.'

'I see.'

'And of course there are plenty of good books on art in the shops.'

'Wonderful. I'm feeling quite excited already.'

Tim came round with the wine. 'Red or white ladies?'

'Red please,' said Sophia.

'Donna, what about you?' he said.

She placed her hand on top of her glass. 'Unfortunately I'm driving. So I'll say no.'

Sophia turned to Donna. 'What do you do for a living?'

'I'm in security at Carrington's department store.'

'That's my favourite store. Haven't they started a sale this week?'

'Yes. And my feet are paying the price.'

'Oh you poor thing. You must be exhausted.'

After the meal everyone retired to the lounge for coffee.

Sophia looked at her watch. 'Verity can I use your phone to call a taxi? I'm loathe to leave but I have an early start tomorrow.'

'Of course. I'll show you where it is in the hall.'

Donna placed her coffee cup on the table and stepped forward. 'Actually I'm going now. I too have an early start. So I can give Sophia a lift.'

'Oh Donna,' said Verity. 'That's really kind of you.'

Donna opened the car door for Sophia and she got in tucking her legs into the front seat and fastened her seat belt. They set off in the direction of Heatherton. The evening was now quite chilly and Donna turned on the heater. 'So,' she said, 'can you recommend an exhibition to start me off?'

'Yes. I'd suggest the Coley Gallery. They have a Pre-Raphaelite display on for two months.'

'That sounds wonderful. Mind you I think I'll be a bit nervous going in alone. I don't suppose '

'Don't suppose what?' asked Sophia.

'I don't suppose you'd accompany me?'

Sophia turned and smiled. 'Of course. It will be a pleasure.'

They drove along the leafy lanes until Elm Grove came into sight. 'Just here on the left,' said Sophia. 'Number sixteen.'

Donna pulled up outside the block of modern apartments. 'There you are,' she said.

'Thank you so much. I've had a lovely evening.'

'Me too,' said Donna. 'And I'll be in touch about the gallery visit.'

Sophia got out of the car and turned and waved as she let herself in through the front door. Donna took one last look at the long legs in black stockings and felt a thrill run through her body.

Celia pulled up outside William's house in Church Close. She switched off the engine and took in the scenery. Large Victorian houses surrounded a well-kept green and the grey stone church with a lichgate entrance dominated the close. It was, she thought, a perfect peaceful haven on the edge of town. She got out of

the car and approached the house. There was a small front garden laid to gravel with a profusion of overflowing colourful tubs. She put the key in the lock and went inside. The house felt cool compared to the sunny day outside and she made her way down the long hallway and entered a light and airy kitchen. She put her handbag on the table and looked out of the French window where steps led down to a patio and a large lawn enclosed by an ivy clad wall. She sighed and imagined herself lounging on a sun bed on the terrace with a glass of chilled wine and a good novel. It was then, as she turned to go upstairs, she saw the family photograph on the wall. She paused momentarily studying the picture of William with his wife and daughter. She'd not seen Helen before. She was attractive, she thought, in a motherly sort of way, but nothing special. And certainly no competition.

She opened her handbag and took out the list of items William had asked for. Pyjamas, dressing gown, shaving items, toothbrush and toothpaste. She touched the list with her finger. Even the sight of his neat hand writing excited her. She went up the narrow stairs and into the main bedroom en-suite where she put some items in a carrier bag. In the bedroom she found clean pyjamas in the bottom of the chest of drawers and a dressing gown hanging behind the door. The bedroom had fitted wardrobes along the length of the far wall. She couldn't resist taking a peek. Inside was a selection of William's suits all hanging neatly from wooden hangers. On opening a second door she found a pile of folded shirts on the middle shelf. She picked one up and put it to her face and breathed in the fresh soapy aroma before reluctantly putting it back on the shelf. When she opened the next door the smile on her face disappeared as she saw Helen's clothes – row after row of dresses, skirts and blouses. She picked out a blue

cocktail dress and looked at the size. Her face creased into a smile as she saw it was a 12. Compared to her size 10 it felt like a moment of triumph. She quickly removed her skirt and blouse and stepped into the dress, taking her time to fasten each button carefully before moving to the full length mirror. She twirled round several times, the skirt of the frock swirling wide and high. 'So,' she said, laughing loudly, 'this is how a dress should look. So much better on someone more sophisticated like me.' She turned round several more times and laughed. 'Yes girl. You've certainly still got it.'

After changing back into her own clothes she made her way downstairs to the kitchen. She took one more glance at the garden with its perfectly mown lawn. Then as she was leaving she saw the note on the mat by the front door.

William,

Helen rang me this morning to say she will be in London for a few more days and not to worry.

Regards

Joyce

Celia picked up the note and tore it up. Then, with a look of delight on her face, let herself out of the front door.

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Margaret, sitting under the steamer at the Curl up and Dye salon, licked the froth off her coffee and chose a thick glossy from the pile of magazines in front of her. After looking through the fashion pages and noting that anything knee length in camel was what the elegant woman of today should be wearing this season she turned to the problem page. Denise Daley, resident agony aunt, featured this month the risks of pre-marital sex. Despite the pill she thought young girls were still vulnerable.

‘Vulnerable my arse,’ she screeched.

‘What was that?’ shouted Ruby, above the sound of the whirring drier she was pointing at the head of an elderly customer while at the same time threading her fingers through the white hair.

Margaret moved her head from under the steamer revealing a scalp full of silver foils. ‘I said, this agony aunt in the magazine is describing young girls today as sexually vulnerable.’

‘Sounds like she ought to get out more,’ snorted Ruby, turning off the drier and spraying lacquer on to the client’s hair.

Margaret returned to her magazine then suddenly let out a loud laugh. ‘Just listen to this. The young women of today have the agonizing choice between career and motherhood. Should they ignore their ticking biological clocks in favour of the career ladder?’ She picked up her cup and stirred her coffee furiously, spilling some onto the saucer. ‘I didn’t have any say in my future. The only agonizing choice I had was to stay and look after my mother. And what bloody thanks do I get?’

‘What’s that?’ shouted Ruby, closing the salon door after seeing the elderly client out on to the pavement.

‘Nothing,’ said Margaret. But from now on, she thought, only the future matters. She turned to the main article and started to read the double page spread ‘*How to catch that man before it’s too late.*’ She had only got to the second paragraph when the timer on the steamer beeped.

‘Right,’ said Ruby, switching off the machine. She opened several of the foils inspecting them closely, ‘they’ve taken well.’

‘I should bloody well hope so at this price,’ cried Margaret, making her way to the row of sinks and settling down on one of the black leather chairs.

Ruby moved Margaret’s head back over the bowl and removed each of the foils and tossed them into the vacant bowl at the side. She then applied shampoo and started to wash the hair in short swirling movements. ‘So, going somewhere special tonight, Margaret?’

‘Yes. I’m going to see the Bond film at the Gaumont.’

‘Lucky you,’ she sighed, as she rinsed off the shampoo and applied conditioner to the roots and combed it through to the ends. ‘I could do with spending a night with James Bond myself.’

‘Couldn’t we all,’ said Margaret, wiping a drop of water from her eye lid.

Ruby rinsed off the conditioner and patted off the excess water with a towel. She took Margaret over to a seat in front of one of the heart shaped mirrors and ran a comb through her hair. ‘Now let’s see what a good cut will do to these locks. Have you got any style in mind?’

‘No,’ said Margaret, looking at her reflection in the mirror. ‘Just make me glamorous. I’m sick of always looking the same, year in year out. Mind you

it has to be something I can do myself. I can't be doing with one of these multi-storey jobs.'

'I'd go for an elegant bob. Your hair is thick enough to take this style.'

'Okay, let's do it before I change my mind.'

Ruby set to work on the hair, cutting off the split ends, creating some long layers and a feathery fringe. She then switched on the blow drier and using a large brush in lavish gestures styled Margaret's hair into its new smooth look.

Margaret looked up from her magazine and stared at her reflection in the mirror. 'Bloody Nora! Is that really me?'

'Yes,' replied Ruby, showing her the back of her head with a hand mirror.

Margaret left the salon with a spring in her step. She couldn't resist looking at her reflection in every shop window she passed. This, she thought, is the first day of the rest of my life.

In a private ward of the Moulton District Hospital William poured himself a cup of coffee from the breakfast tray. The autumn sun shone through the blinds and he could see the occasional orange leaf falling on its way to the ground. But he stiffened as the door opened and Mr Fielding entered.

'Morning, Mr Patterson. I hope you slept well,' he said, his deep voice carrying a certain confidence.

'Thank you, yes,' replied William.

'Well,' he said, peering over his glasses, his presence looming large in an immaculate pin stripe suit and yellow bow tie. 'It's good news.'

‘Thank God,’ said William.

The consultant raised his hand. ‘I say it’s good news. But I also need to talk to you about the future.’

‘I see,’ said William, his initial feeling of euphoria fading.

‘The tests showed no signs of any blockages. Heart is absolutely sound.’

‘So, what’s all this about the future?’

The consultant put down his notes on the bed. ‘The thing is William you are living a very stressful life. Next time you may not be so lucky. The body can only take so much.’

‘Next time?’

‘If you go on living at this pace you will certainly be putting yourself at risk of a heart attack or a stroke.’

‘So what should I do?’

‘Lead a healthier life.’

He picked up William’s chart from the bottom of the bed and studied it. He looked up. ‘Your symptoms have been caused by stress.’ He brushed a piece of fluff off his trousers and sighed. ‘So what I’m suggesting is not a quick fix. You need to change your whole lifestyle.’

‘I see. So what are the changes I need to make?’

‘Keep your weight down, eat sensibly, and get plenty of exercise. You need to work less hours. Create some interests outside work. I’ve asked sister to give you a couple of leaflets.’ He stopped in the doorway and turned. ‘It’s up to you, William. The choice is yours.’

An hour later he was dressed and packed. The sister came in with his leaflets and put them on the bed.

‘Thank you,’ he said, placing them in his breast pocket. ‘I’ll read them when I get home. And thank you for everything.’

She smiled. ‘It’s what I’m paid for. Oh, by the way, your wife is outside waiting to take you home.’

‘Really? I thought she was in London.’

‘Shall I send her in?’

‘Yes please.’

‘There was a knock on the door. He turned. Celia entered wearing an elegant navy dress and her hair loose with a natural windswept look. He found it hard to disguise his pleasure. ‘Celia, how kind of you to come. They’ve just discharged me.’

‘I know,’ she said, placing a kiss on his mouth and letting her lips linger. ‘I’ve come to take you home.’

In the car he watched her weave in and out of the morning traffic. She took the scenic route down the leafy lanes of suburbia and eventually stopped the car outside her flat. He looked at her in surprise. ‘Why here?’ he said.

‘Why not here?’ she replied, a smile crossing her thin features. ‘Look, William. You’ve had a nasty shock and been through a rough time. I think you deserve a bit of spoiling and I’m going to be the person to do it.’

He couldn’t help but like her all the more for being so kind. He looked up at her flat and then put his hand on her shoulder. ‘This really is good of you, Celia. But I don’t want to be a nuisance.’

She took his hand in hers. 'How could you ever be a nuisance?' She got out of the car and unlocked the front door. He followed her and stepped inside.

She went to the kitchen and switched on the kettle. 'Coffee?'

'That would be lovely. Anything I can do?'

'No, just leave everything to me.'

He watched her from the living room filling the percolator and putting out cups on a tray. He was impressed with this woman. And the fact that she was willing to put his needs first. He really ought to phone Helen, he thought, but she was in London and they'd parted on such bad terms. His house at Church Close would be empty. So what harm could it do in spending time with Celia?

Patrick finished displaying the new range of shirts in menswear and then made his way up the stairs to the canteen. He joined the long queue as staff arrived for meals and picked up a chocolate brownie to go with his coffee. As he moved along the queue he couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Margaret sporting a new hairstyle. At first he wasn't sure it was her but when he heard the familiar voice he knew he was not mistaken.

'So how are things in menswear?' she said. 'Any bargains going?'

'Plenty in the sales.'

She noticed him staring at her hair. 'Like it?' she asked, pointing to the auburn highlights.

'Yeah, looks really great. So, tell me, who is the lucky man then?'

'Ah, go on with you,' she said. 'I did it for me not for any man.'

‘Well, it looks pretty cool to me. You look so much younger.’

‘Ta,’ she replied, grinning widely. ‘Do you want a dollop of cream on that brownie?’

‘No. I’m sweet enough. And I’ve got my figure to think of.’

‘Good God there’s nothing of you. Wait until you’ve got an arse the size of mine,’ she said, slapping her large backside with her hand. ‘Then you’ll definitely have something to worry about.’

He laughed. ‘Well I think you’ve got a lovely bottom, Margaret. I like a woman with some meat on her.’

‘You lying sod,’ she said, placing a generous helping of chips onto a plate for the next person in the queue and adding a sachet of ketchup.

He took his tray to a corner table where Toby was writing in his diary. ‘You look busy. Sorting out some hot dates?’

‘I wish. No, the boss is off for a few days so I need to cover for him at some meetings.’

‘Is he ill?’

‘No. He just decided to take a few days holiday.’

‘That doesn’t sound like the old workhorse. You usually can’t keep him away from the place.’

‘I know. Very strange.’

‘So you don’t know exactly where he is?’

‘No. He just told me to catch him on his mobile if there’s an emergency.’

Patrick cut his brownie in two and put a piece in his mouth. ‘Ummmm. Now that’s what I call home baking,’ he said, as the chocolate mixture melted on his tongue.

Toby laughed. 'Home baking factory style, you mean. I don't imagine Margaret was up all night baking them.'

Patrick stirred his coffee and placed the spoon on the saucer. 'Talking about Margaret have you seen the transformation in her?'

'I know. She looks years younger with that new hairstyle.' He laughed. 'Just needs to lose four stone and she could be quite presentable.' His eyes went in the direction of the counter where she was putting a tray of chips on the hot food section.

Patrick took a sip of his coffee and then replaced the cup on the saucer.

'Mind you,' he said, 'she would be the last woman I'd ever want to shag.'

Reg, slumped comfortably in his chair, stared at the television screen. He didn't know how many more daytime programmes he could take. This afternoon he'd started to watch *Guess what's in the Box* but when the woman with the waist length blonde hair appeared he realised it was a repeat. The thought of listening to her squeaky voice and attempts at making no progress on the scoreometer was best avoided. He flicked the remote control at the screen and switched channels. He then got up and filled the kettle, turning it at an angle to make room above the stack of dirty pots piled in the sink. The clock above the stove told him it was three o'clock as he heard the familiar tune of the local news starting up. The main story was of a missing student.

He switched off the kettle and poured the boiling water over a tea bag in a mug. From the window sill he picked up a half bottle of milk, but as he put it to his nose and sniffed the sour smell, he grimaced, deciding to do without. He

glanced again at the clock. It was still only five past three. Five hours before his night shift at the store started. He couldn't go to the park, not after that stupid girl caught him photographing her. He would, he knew, have to lie low for a while. The incident with the girl would remain his little secret. In the meantime he had his photograph collection to keep him company. He opened the door of the spare bedroom. There was a strong musty smell, the mattress was stained, and a pile of newspapers were stacked in the corner. He switched on the lamp to bring light to a room where he kept the curtains permanently closed. He put on his glasses and looked at the photographs pinned on the wall. All were young women in their prime. All were unaware of being snapped. His eyes moved to the bottom row. The two pictures showed very different sides of the latest girl. He ran his fingers over them. The first photo was so beautiful, smiling and innocent. In the second photo she was ugly and frowning, pointing her finger at the camera. He stepped back from the wall. 'You need teaching a lesson young lady,' he sighed. 'A very hard lesson.' A sly smile crossed his face. Unzipping his fly he knew she would soon lose her innocence under his masterful guidance.

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In the staff changing room Donna applied lipstick and then pressed her lips firmly together. She was pleased with the bold colour. It had been a long day with the sales bringing extra problems as larger crowds mingled in the store.

Now with the day behind her she felt excited at seeing Sophia again. She put on her black jacket, ran her hand through her short bleached hair and set off for the meeting.

Sophia was waiting on the steps of the gallery as Donna came out of the car park. She was talking to two elderly ladies and giving them directions by raising and pointing her hand. Tonight she wore a plain black dress, a red bolero, and her long legs were accentuated by high heeled shoes. Sophia saw her and smiled. 'Hello. Nice to see you again.'

'You too,' replied Donna, noticing the bright pink lipstick she wore made her mouth seem larger and even more attractive.

They made their way through the large glass doors to the foyer. The building had a minimalist look and three large crystal chandeliers hanging from the high ceiling delivered light.

'Now,' whispered Sophia, 'I thought we'd start by looking at the pre-Raphaelite exhibition upstairs.' She led the way waving a card at the receptionist and getting a nod. They entered a room through large double doors. 'Here we are,' she whispered.

Donna walked round the room studying the pictures. Sophia, she noticed, had put on a pair of glasses to inspect the pictures. They added an intellectual appearance that she liked in a woman. She had the urge to rush up to

her, remove the glasses, and pin her against the wall. But she let the thought go and cast her eyes on the next picture placing her head on one side to examine the details of the young woman in the silk blue dress.

Sophia came up behind her. 'This is Proserpine painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The story goes that Proserpine was kidnapped by Pluto, the god of the underworld, to be his wife. She begged to be returned to earth, but as she'd eaten some pomegranate seeds Pluto confined her to his kingdom for half of each year.'

'Poor girl,' said Donna, stepping forward to examine the picture more closely.

'You make it all sound so interesting. It certainly comes to life when you learn the history behind the picture.' She noticed again that Sophia's pink lips seemed very inviting.

'Exactly.'

Later they went to the bar for a drink. Donna took out her purse. 'What will you have?'

'Dry white wine please,' said Sophia, making her way to sit by one of the floor to ceiling windows and admire the view of the town now lit up by thousands of lights.

When Donna arrived with the drinks she noticed Sophia had removed her bolero and the curve of her breasts could be seen through her dress. She longed to reach out and touch them.

'Can we do this again, Sophia? I've really loved your company tonight.'

'Yes, I'd like that.' She looked at her watch. 'Oh dear, I didn't realize the time. I must fly. I'm expecting an important phone call tonight.'

‘I’ll give you a lift.’

They drove through the town centre and out on the Langley road towards Sophia’s flat. There were several teenagers about, some riding bikes, others standing in groups on street corners. An elderly man stepped out into the road and Donna slammed on the brakes. He waved his stick in the air and carried on across the road. ‘Idiot,’ shouted Donna. ‘He didn’t even look.’

They turned off the main road and drove along the tree-lined lane.

Sophia looked up at her flat. ‘Thank you so much. I really enjoyed tonight.’ She undid her seat belt and picked up her bag. Donna leaned across and gave Sophia a quick peck on the cheek. She at once smelt the delicate fragrance that always accompanied her and felt she could not let the moment go. She took Sophia’s face in her hands and kissed her passionately on the lips.

‘Now off you go,’ said Donna, tapping her on the knee, ‘or you’ll miss that phone call. I’ll give you a ring. Perhaps you’d like to come to my place for dinner as a thank you.’

Celia chose the ingredients from the local deli very carefully. The meal for William was going to be very special. He particularly loved quail and she would add a lemon and tarragon sauce. She waited at the meat counter and watched the assistant, a portly man in a blue and white apron and straw boater, approach.

‘Good morning Mrs Langridge. How can I help you today?’

‘I’d like four of your best quail please.’

‘Good choice,’ he said, picking up the quail from the front of the counter and wrapping them in paper before transferring them to a plastic bag and tying

the top with a tight knot. 'Anything else?' he said, his ruddy complexion shining under the bright light above.

'No, thank you. That will do nicely.' She went to the dessert counter and chose a couple of slices of strawberry cheesecake and then made her way to her car. With William staying at her place she couldn't be happier. He'd slept in the spare room and in the middle of the night she'd crept in to watch him sleeping. He looked as peaceful as a baby so she'd stayed in the room for quite a while just happy to be near him. She got into her car, piled the shopping on the back seat, turned the ignition, and pulled out into the traffic. She headed towards home but when she stopped at the traffic lights decided to pull off the main road and head towards Church Close. William, she thought, might have some post waiting. She ought to check. She turned into Church Close and parked outside number seven. The close was very peaceful and the autumn leaves were piled high on the pavement. She put the key in the front door and let herself in. There were three letters on the mat which she picked up as she walked through to the kitchen. This was one of her favourite rooms. It had a light and airy feel to it. She could imagine herself breakfasting here and in the summer taking a glass of wine out onto the terrace while she waited for William to come home from work. She looked again at the family photograph on the wall. At this precise moment she wanted to tear Helen out of the picture and place herself next to William where she belonged. She looked at the three letters she'd picked up. All were circulars and of no particular importance so she placed them in her handbag and left the house.

When she arrived back at her flat William was dressed and watching television. He turned off the volume as she came into the living room. 'Some

bloody rubbish on the box in the day,' he said. 'I think if I was home all day I'd shoot myself.'

'That bad?' she said, going through to the kitchen area and unpacking the shopping. He picked up the newspaper and turned the pages. 'Let's see what's on tonight.' He looked down the columns in front of him. 'Oh, I don't believe it!'

'What?' she said.

'Casablanca. God I haven't seen that film for years.'

'It's one of my all-time favourites.'

He laughed. '*Well, here's looking at you kid,*' he said, pretending to pull up the collar of an imaginary overcoat.

She laughed as she opened another carrier bag. 'I hope you're hungry.'

'Why? What have you got planned?'

'We're having quail.'

He looked up. 'Celia. You really are wonderful.'

'Nonsense,' she said, 'It's a pleasure to look after you. And I think you need building up.'

'Well I won't argue. Now what can I do?' he said, as she placed the quail in the oven and started the sauce.

'Just lay the table. Knives and forks and crockery are in the cupboard by your side.'

He put place mats, cutlery and plates on the table. He glanced out of the window and noticed the woman in the flat opposite. She was making her way through a large pile of ironing. A television on a wall bracket was displaying some sort of quiz show where contestants had boxes with numbers in front of them. Every so often the woman threw back her head and roared with laughter.

He moved back to the sofa and started the crossword. It took him some time to get into the mind of the compiler and he struggled over the earlier clues.

‘Like a drink?’ called Celia from the kitchen.

‘Yes, I’ll have a beer. What would you like?’

‘I’ll have a sherry,’ she said. ‘But only a large one.’

‘I see,’ he said. ‘That sounds like me after a bad day.’

‘Not always after a bad day I hope. Surely there are times to celebrate?’

She passed him a can of beer from the fridge and placed a tall glass alongside.

‘Yes of course there are celebrations. But lately there seem to have been less to make a fuss about,’ he said, pouring a glass of sherry from the cabinet for her.

‘There you go,’ he said, placing the crystal glass on the kitchen unit.

‘So why have you got less to celebrate? Surely there are some good moments in your life?’

‘Yes, but I’ve become so busy at the store that leisure time seems to have passed me by. And then of course with this threatened takeover there have been a lot of worries.’

‘Ah yes. The American company. Do you think it will actually go ahead?’

‘Who knows? But if it does it will be the end of Carrington’s as we know it.’

‘But surely they’ll trade under the same name.’

‘Not necessarily. Depends on what the sales contract says. They may keep the name for a while but then it will change.’

‘Well, for today, we will have our own celebration.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Good health. Here’s to the future. A long and happy life.’

‘I’ll drink to that,’ he said, clinking her glass gently.

Helen was working on some notes for the court case in her hotel room when there was a knock at her door. She looked through the spy hole and her heart sank when she saw Simon standing there. She opened the door. ‘Hello, Simon. What can I do for you?’

He walked past her and strutted about the room not seeming to be able to settle. Eventually he spoke. ‘I suppose you think you are being very clever?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘You know what I’m referring to. You being taken on by the firm for training.’

‘Ah, I see,’ she said. ‘We are back to that are we? Look why don’t you sit down. You’re making me nervous with all this moving about.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I’d prefer to stand. I can think more clearly when I’m on my feet.’

She got up and moved across to the window and looked out at the cars below. The traffic seemed to be continuous in the city, she thought. She watched a van trying to reverse into a tight parking space. After trying to get in forward the driver then moved out of the space, shot forward, and started to reverse in. He made it on the second attempt.

Simon was pacing up and down. 'Just who do you think you are? Swanning into this company under the pretext of being a P.A. and all the time you're intending to get your feet under the boardroom table.'

She turned her back on the window. 'Simon, I did not join the company to become a solicitor. The thought of training had never entered my head.' She folded her arms and watched his face. This had, she thought, been simmering for days. 'Look, I have been offered this position by Gerry. I'd be a fool to pass it by. I don't see why you are getting in such a state. It's not as if we are in direct competition.'

'Not in direct competition. How can you say that? From what I've heard you are interested in family law.'

'That's right. I'd like to help women get a fair deal,' she said, raising her voice to match his.

'So just what do you think this London case is all about? Scotch mist?'

'Of course I realize it is family law. But this is not your usual area is it?'

'It might be,' he said, looking directly at her. 'I might want to make it my future area.' He moved across to the mini bar and helped himself to a tonic water, unscrewing the cap and placing the bottle to his mouth. 'I don't want some stranger barging in and taking away any choices I might or might not want.'

'You mean, you don't want this older woman joining the team and bringing any new ideas along.'

'That's your interpretation,' he said, screwing the cap back on the bottle of tonic water and placing it on the dressing table with a loud thud.

'Have you a better one? Perhaps you're scared of any competition.'

‘Don’t be so ridiculous. You’ve been out of the job market for too long to be any threat to me. I’d much prefer to take on a young law graduate any time.’

‘A young law graduate you could mould to your own liking.’ She could feel her heart beating fast. ‘Look, Simon, like it or not I’m being taken on by the firm. We have to learn to get along. Now if you don’t mind I’ve got these notes to sort out.’ She sat down at the desk and picked up her pen.

‘Fine,’ he said. ‘I’ll see you in court in the morning. But just one thing.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Don’t expect this situation to be a fair fight. I can certainly play dirty when I have to.’ He left the room slamming the door behind him. She got up and moved to the window. She took deep breaths to calm herself. The restaurant opposite was filling up with diners. A waiter at a window table was taking an order on his notepad and pointing out items on the menu to the customer. Although the city was busy and bustling she felt very alone. She went back to her desk and dialled home. It rang several times and she eventually put down the receiver.

Celia watched William drain the contents of his third glass of claret. ‘It’s so nice to see you looking more relaxed.’

‘Thank you.’ he said. ‘Oh and by the way the quail was delicious.’

‘Glad you enjoyed it,’ she said, replenishing his glass after removing the cork of a second bottle of wine.

‘Hey, steady on,’ he said, raising his hand. ‘Not trying to get me drunk are you?’

‘Of course.’ she said. ‘This is my main hobby. I bring men up here all the time and get them tipsy.’

‘Well I’m more than tipsy,’ he said, leaving the table and settling on the sofa.

She joined him and sat very close. ‘You’ve had a rough time lately, haven’t you? All the worry and stress about the possible takeover.’ She chose her words carefully and did not mention anything about home and Helen. She sat back moving a cushion to one side making herself more comfortable. ‘And,’ she said, letting her back sink into the comfortable leather suite, ‘I imagine the worst part is that you’ve had no one to talk to about it all? Life can get pretty lonely when you’ve things on your mind?’

She poured him another glass of wine. He’s perfect, she thought to herself.

She noticed him staring at her. ‘What are you thinking?’ she said. He reddened slightly. ‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing?’ she said, looking at him quizzically. ‘Do tell me. Surely we don’t have any secrets.’

He coughed and cleared his throat. ‘Actually I was thinking how nice it is when someone like you puts me first. It’s a long time since I felt so relaxed and able to talk like this. You have no idea how good it feels.’

She looked up from her drink. ‘It’s nice for me too, William. I so enjoy your company.’ She leaned in closer and put her hand on his arm. ‘You were so

kind to me at the wedding that day. You very kindly gave me a lift to the reception.'

He grinned. 'I didn't even want to go to that damn reception.'

She laughed. 'Neither did I. We were two lost souls that day. But at least we found each other.'

'Yes. And your tour of the garden was wonderful. I learnt all the names of the plants.'

'Which you've no doubt forgotten.'

'Of course.'

She moved forward on the sofa. 'Coffee?'

'Please.'

But as he moved forward to reach for his glass she took hold of his arm and pulled him to her, placing a kiss on his lips.

He responded slowly at first. Then kissed her long and hard.

'Let's go to bed,' she said.

He picked up the bottle of wine and glasses and followed her to the bedroom.

Reg was getting ready to go to work. He liked the idea of clocking on when everyone else was going home. He liked having the place to himself. The silence in the empty store. He finished his drink of tea that was now nearly cold and put the mug in the sink. He was just locking the back door when he felt a tap on the shoulder.

'Evening,' said the voice.

Reg jumped and turned round. 'Christ, Eric. You frightened the shit out of me creeping up like that.'

'Oops! Sounds like someone has a guilty conscience.'

Reg felt himself stiffen. 'What do you mean guilty conscience?'

Eric stood back and laughed. 'Only joking, mate. I'm not suggesting you've got anything to be guilty about. You haven't, have you?'

Reg felt irritated by Eric's stupid manner. He always seemed to be hanging about the garden waiting for people to pass. He knew everyone's business.

He made his way along the narrow path to the gate. 'Look, I'm in a rush. I've got to dash.'

'But I've got something to show you. It's important. Something a security guard might be interested in.'

Reg stopped to shut his gate. 'Look, I've already said I'm in a rush. Whatever it is it can surely wait until tomorrow.'

'Not interested in local news then? It's on the front page of the *Chronicle*.'

'As I said, Eric, I'm in a rush. So just leave it.' He set off down the lane to the main road, quickening his pace until he was into his regular stride. He arrived at the store and went to the canteen. Margaret was replenishing a tray of sausages on the hotplate. She looked up. 'Evening, handsome. What can I get you?'

'Oh a nice ample blonde will do.'

'In your bloody dreams,' she said.

He winked and then looked at the hot food trays in front of him.

‘Sausage, chips and peas will do nicely.’

She filled his plate giving him an extra sausage and grinning. ‘There you go,’ she said, ‘that should see you right.’

‘Thanks, Margaret. By the way I like the new hairstyle. Very nice.’

‘Thank you.’ She patted her head with her hand. ‘It makes me feel like a new woman.’

He helped himself to tea from the machine and headed for a corner table that had just become vacant. He started to eat his dinner. The sausages, cooked in onions and gravy, were just the way he liked them. Margaret certainly knew how to cook. He watched her behind the counter talking to one of the girls from cosmetics. She was pointing to a spot on her face and the girl, who Reg noticed was wearing a short black skirt, was inspecting it closely.

He sipped the hot tea slowly and glanced at the clock. Five minutes before his shift started. Just enough time to have a quick look at the *Chronicle* that someone had left on the table. He picked it up and glanced at the sports page. The local lads were struggling in the league and the football ground was badly in need of a new stand. There was a woman’s page that had the headline *How to find the G Spot*. He grinned and turned to the front page. His heart missed several beats when he read the headline and looked at the picture.

Local Girl Goes Missing

Local girl Emily Carson has been missing for three days. Emily, a sociology student at Moulton University, did not return to the house she shares with three other female students on Monday evening. She was last seen entering Woodley Park at lunchtime on Monday. Her disappearance is a mystery. Detective Inspector Phil Nicholls stated that full enquiries were ongoing and asked anyone who knows anything about Emily's disappearance or was in the park on Monday to come forward or telephone the police station.

He quickly put the paper under his arm and left the canteen. In the quiet of his office he sat at his desk and read the item again. Christ, he thought, it's that fucking girl from the park. He felt his heart starting to race. The paper said her name was Emily Carson. He'd kept a low profile since meeting her. He looked again at the picture of the smiling Emily. What a shame that the last time he'd seen her she was not smiling and was so angry. Now he'd not be able to go to the park again. But the thought of not photographing his beautiful girls was almost too much to bear.

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12.

William squinted and put his hand over his eyes as the bright sun shone through the blinds of Celia's bedroom. His head was thumping and his mouth dry. It had been a while since he'd drunk so much but last night he'd felt so relaxed in Celia's company that it didn't seem to matter. But today he knew he would pay the price. Gone were his younger days when he had the ability to recover from a heavy hangover by a mid-morning coffee break. Nowadays to his chagrin the recovery would take much longer and it would not be until the late afternoon before he started to feel anything like human again. Celia was sleeping soundly beside him with her blonde hair lying loosely across the pillow and her bare arms resting on the silk sheets.

He quietly slipped out of bed, put on his dressing gown and made his way to the kitchen. He opened the fridge door and took out a carton of orange juice. It felt cold beneath his fingers and he drank it straight from the pack, the fresh taste satisfying his thirst for the moment. He switched on the kettle and waited for it to boil. He looked down to the small paved courtyard below where a wooden seat was covered in autumn leaves and two fat wood pigeons waddled about like old bag ladies, their heads moving back and forth as they searched the ground for food. On spotting a piece of bread, one of them scurried into a corner. The other one followed but by then the first one had taken the bread in its beak and flown off. It looked dejected momentarily and then continued its search on the flag stones.

As the kettle started to boil he put two tablespoons of ground coffee into a cafetiere and poured the water on top. It tasted strong as he sipped it. It was, he

knew, going to be the first of many cups that morning. He looked again at the courtyard below. The birds were now gone and leaves continued to fall from the trees onto the ground. He took a seat at the breakfast bar and smiled as he thought about last night. Celia had made him feel like a man again - strong, masculine and totally in control of every move. He'd felt her beneath him – warm, vulnerable and submissive. But now he thought about Helen and what he'd done. He had not been unfaithful before. Not once in all the years they had been married. And a feeling of shame swept over him.

An hour later Celia watched as William placed items neatly into his leather suitcase.

‘Do you really have to go?’ she sighed, coming up behind him and placing her arms around his waist. ‘Surely you can stay longer. Particularly,’ she smiled wickedly, ‘after last night.’

He took her hand in his and kissed the palm. ‘Last night was wonderful, Celia. However I really must get back to work.’ He looked round the room to see if he'd missed anything. He spotted a sock on the floor and put it into the case.

‘You can leave anything you like,’ she said, ‘this is as much your home as mine.’

He smiled, went over to her and took her in his arms. ‘You’ve been so incredibly kind.’

She looked up at him. ‘You’d do the same for me. I know you would.’

‘Of course,’ he said. ‘That’s what friends are for.’

‘We’re more than friends now,’ she said, looking into his eyes.

He clasped her face in his hands and kissed her passionately on the lips. He reluctantly let go. 'I really must be off. The store won't run itself.'

'Promise you'll ring,' she said.

He laughed. 'Scout's honour' he said, saluting and clicking his heels.

She waved him off from the doorway and then returned to the kitchen and made herself a coffee before settling on the sofa, tucking her legs beneath her and clasping her hands around the china cup. She felt wonderful – young, attractive, feminine. William had been a very passionate lover and the memory of his touch lingered. He had been gentle and considerate. She took a sip of her coffee and wiped the froth from her lips. I've got him exactly where I want him, she thought.

William drove home to drop off his overnight bag and change into his suit for work. The familiar sight of Church Close came into view. A young man in a tracksuit and woollen hat was walking along the pavement with a leash in his hand. Several yards behind a black Labrador sniffed a lamppost before cocking its leg. It then ran along the pavement with its tongue dangling from its open mouth as it attempted to catch up. William let himself in the front door. The hallway was silent and he picked up some post from the mat and sorted through it, putting bills to one side and circulars in the bin. He went upstairs and changed into his suit. The time with Celia had been just what he needed to restore his fading confidence. He felt a new man. He went down the thick carpeted stairs to the kitchen and switched on the kettle. There were no messages that he could see so it looked like Helen would soon be home.

The incident room at Moulton police station was noisy as uniformed staff and CID members took their places for the morning meeting. The air, full of tension and the smell of coffee, took on a hushed silence as Detective Inspector Phil Nicholls entered the room. He took off his jacket, exposing his large frame, smoothed down his thick grey hair and placed a file on the desk in front of him. He started to speak.

‘Good morning.’ His gruff voice was loud and clear. He pointed to the pictures on the board behind him. ‘What we have here is the case of the missing girl Emily Carson. At this stage we do not know whether we are looking for a runaway or a body. So, all on-going enquiries must track her last movements. ‘Where are we up to at the present time?’ he asked, handing over to Sergeant Joanne Keeley.

She stood up. ‘Friends and family have been interviewed. It seems this is very out of character. She always gets back to the house before 1 pm – but as far as the other students are concerned she didn’t mention she was going out that night.’

‘So,’ said Mike Dalton, duty sergeant, sitting at the back of the room, ‘why didn’t they report her missing earlier? Why leave it until the next morning?’

Kate Davidson pointed to the board behind her. ‘This is a student area. They come and go at irregular hours.’

‘And so,’ chipped in D I Nicholls, ‘they assumed she was in bed when they arrived home?’

‘Exactly,’ replied Kate.

‘What about a boyfriend?’ asked the D I, his loud voice echoing in the room. It was the kind of voice that demands and gets respect.

‘No one special,’ she replied.

‘Exam worries?’

‘No. She seems to be a bright student. Passed all previous exams. No re-sits.’

‘Right,’ he said, opening the file on the desk in front of him. ‘We start again. House to house enquiries, full search of the park, get on to the divers to have another look at the lake.’

Kate made notes on her pad. This was becoming a difficult case. The longer the girl was missing the more likely it would become a murder case.

They had to move fast. Leave no stone unturned. She turned to the D.I.

‘Another Press conference?’

‘Yes. And ask the parents to come in again. Someone somewhere must have seen something. The more we keep this case in the public eye the more chance we have of someone remembering something.’

William took a detour and travelled to the neighbouring town of Brighton. The area in comparison to Moulton had a somewhat dilapidated look. Several shops were empty, others boarded up. The regeneration scheme for Brighton had been planned ten years earlier but with the recession and the shelving of several proposed ideas the town had remained in its faded state.

The Rightways building came into view. The wide glass doors enticing customers inside left no space for any window display. As he entered the store he was met by the numerous untidy racks of women's tops and skirts, all beneath the hanging red buffalo logo. Several skirts were parted from their hangers and lay on the floor. He stepped over a couple of them and made his way to where the luggage and handbags were piled high on top of one another. He was taking a look to see the quality of the goods when he was shoved to one side as a female shopper pushed her way through the crowds, trailing behind her a tartan shopping trolley.

The atmosphere felt hot and the smell of perspiration lingered in the air. He climbed the stairs to the upper level following the red and white signs to the toys, electrical goods, and self-service cafe. He took a tray and queued for a drink and sat at a corner table. The tea served in a plastic cup tasted watery. Two women on the next table were laughing loudly, surrounded by Rightways carrier bags. He closed his eyes. How can Carrington's get swallowed up by this crap outfit, he thought. If he was kept on as manager, and at this moment it was still only an if, it would be impossible to even consider turning it into anything decent. It was cheap and nasty. Gone would be the elegant chrome interior, the designer labels, and the look of quality. All would be replaced with cheap shoddy goods. He left the store without a backward glance and headed across the road to the Rose and Crown. He took a seat at the bar and ordered a large whiskey. It was going to be a very long night.

Patrick watched Margaret walking up the stairs to the staff canteen. The auburn highlights in her new hairstyle shone under the bright overhead lights. It was certainly an improvement on the previous tight perm, he thought. He also noticed that she was experimenting with make-up and wore pale blue eye shadow. But Toby was right she needed to shed at least four stone to complete the new image. He watched her put on her red and brown overall, lifting her arms as she eased the material over her head. Her calves were noticeably heavy and appeared to be reinforced as if for the purpose of supporting her huge bottom.

She turned and saw him. 'Watcha cock,' she shouted. 'You're up early?'

He winked. 'Here to see my favourite lady.'

'Ah go on with you.' She laughed and waved her hand as if to dismiss the remark.

'No, I really mean it. Do you realize how attractive your new hairstyle has made you?'

She looked up from tying the belt on her overall. 'Well thank you,' she said, patting her hair with her hand and making a bobbing curtsy movement.

'Now young man. What's it to be? Full breakfast?'

'Yes please, Margaret.'

'I'll give you an extra sausage for being so nice.'

'Make sure it's a big one. I always have a big one.'

She looked up and cackled loudly. 'Oooh! You naughty boy.'

'I don't know what you mean. I'm never naughty,' he said, taking the plate off her and then kissing her hand. 'Thank you, Margaret. You're such a sweetie.'

‘Steady on,’ she replied.

He was just about to take his tray to the till when he stopped and looked at her, his eyes trying to avoid her breasts that he found matronly and not at all sexy. ‘Was it you I saw coming out of the Gaumont last night?’

‘Yes. It was a James Bond film.’

He took a seat in the corner of the canteen. He sighed. The bookie was chasing him for money. He’d make sure he was out tonight. He hadn’t seen a James Bond film for ages. Perhaps going to the Gaumont would be a good place to escape to.

Reg had not slept well. He’d tossed and turned throughout the morning.

Normally he had no trouble resting in the day. The thick curtains kept out the daylight, but the sound of Eric’s efforts to erect a trellis outside with the continual hammering on wood had disturbed his usual good slumber. Now he gave up on the whole idea, put on some clothes and started to make a drink. He turned on the television and watched the last half of a quiz where contestants had to guess the contents of a parcel. ‘Thick sod,’ he shouted, as one of them did not guess that it was a cushion inside the parcel. ‘Any bloody fool would have got that,’ he sighed.

Reg had been so engrossed in the programme he’d not heard anyone enter his flat. He jumped when he saw the figure in the lounge doorway. He turned down the volume with the remote control.

Eric moved into the room. ‘I knocked several times but there was no reply. The door was open so I thought I’d better see if you were okay.’

‘Did you think I was dead?’

‘Well you sometimes hear about people dying alone and not being found for days and sometimes months.’

‘But as you can see I’m definitely alive and kicking. So what do you want?’

‘This is for you,’ he replied, putting a paper bag on the coffee table.

‘What is it?’

‘Beans. I’ve had a good crop this year. Thought you might like some.’

‘Ta,’ said Reg, looking into the bag. ‘And how is the trellis coming along? You’ve made enough bloody noise.’

‘Finished. Take a look out.’

Reg got from his chair and looked out of the kitchen window. There in Eric’s garden was a large wooden pergola. ‘Bugger me. I thought it was going to be a trellis.’

‘Me too. I changed my mind. Went and got some rustic poles and finished it about an hour ago. Pretty good eh?’

Reg had to admit that it looked professional and as if it would withstand the test of time. He turned round. ‘Fancy a cuppa?’

‘Don’t mind if I do.’

‘Sit yourself down then.’

‘Actually I could do with a pee. Alright if I use your bog?’

‘Yeah, help yourself.’

Reg filled the kettle from the tap and plugged it in to the socket on the wall. He took two mugs from the sink and put a tea bag in each. While waiting for the water to boil he opened the back door and went to take a look at the

pergola. On closer inspection Eric had made a good job of it. Each piece of wood slotted together well. He felt it with his hand and it resisted any movement. He was impressed.

When Eric came out of the bathroom the draught from Reg opening the back door had pushed ajar the spare bedroom door. He'd never been in this room before and had often wondered why the curtains were always kept closed. He noticed Reg was outside with his back to him inspecting the pergola so he pushed the bedroom door and went in. There seemed to be lots of photos on the wall. It was hard to make them out clearly so he turned on the light. A chill ran through him as he cast his eyes over the pictures of the young girls. Then his eyes settled on the four pictures on the bottom row. It was the missing girl, Emily something. He quickly turned off the light and quietly shut the door as he stepped into the hallway.

Reg was just coming in from the garden. 'You made a good job of that pergola, Eric.'

'Aye. Should see me out.'

Reg switched off the kettle and started to pour the boiling water into the mugs.

Eric stepped forward. 'Actually, Reg,' he said, his voice nervous and unsteady, 'if it's okay with you I'll skip the tea. I didn't realize the time and I need to be somewhere else.'

'Okay,' said Reg. He put the kettle back on the unit.

'I'll see myself out. Bye.'

Reg took his mug of tea into the lounge and turned up the volume on the television. The quiz game was still going on and a parcel was being passed to a lady contestant.

Next door Eric picked up the local paper from the table and wrote down a number on a pad before picking up the phone.

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13.

Helen stepped off the plane and after passing through security got in the car beside Simon. He said nothing during the fifteen minute drive into town and Helen decided, after the previous night's heated conversation, to contribute nothing to his silence. He was, she thought, spoilt, pompous and arrogant. The passage ahead, she knew, was going to be rocky. He would block every opportunity that came her way. Yet in her heart she knew she must grab this opportunity with both hands. When she got to her office she put the heavy files on her desk and took the cover off her typewriter. The day ahead would be a busy one with catching up on work that had accumulated in her absence. But with the custody case behind them after the judge recommended that Anneli reside with her mother she could now concentrate on her work and future plans.

The door opened. 'Coffee!' shouted Simon. 'You're still only a PA so get me a cup. And while you're at it,' he said, throwing a form on her desk, 'take these expenses to accounts.'

Helen fetched the coffee, knocked on his door and put the cup on his desk. He was on the phone leaning back in his chair and did not make eye contact. She walked down the corridor to accounts and entered.

Judy looked up and smiled. 'Helen, you're back. How lovely to see you. Now come on in. Tell me everything. Absolutely everything.'

'Well,' said Helen, putting Simon's expenses form on the desk, 'not sure where to start.'

Judy took off her glasses. 'Start at the beginning and don't miss out a thing.'

‘Okay. We got off to a bad start when Simon’s luggage went missing.’

‘Hah!’ laughed Judy. ‘Serve the bugger right. Couldn’t happen to a nicer bloke. Was he furious?’

‘Very. Just imagine a Rottweiler with toothache.’

‘Good,’ said Judy, her face creasing into a broad smile.

‘He had to go out and buy some new clothes to tide him over.’

‘My God! I’m really enjoying this. He wouldn’t like that.’

‘No, he didn’t. He’s very particular about his appearance. Apparently he’s used the same tailor for years.’

‘So, don’t tell me, he ended up having to slum it and buy off the peg like the rest of us?’

‘That’s about it.’

‘I believe,’ said Judy, heading toward the small kitchen and switching on the kettle, ‘that the court case went tits up?’

‘Yes. Predictable really. Most mothers get custody. But the father has been given greater access to his daughter with weekends and holidays.’

Helen heard the kettle switch itself off and Judy returned with two cups of tea. She put on her glasses and peered over them at Helen. ‘And what’s this I hear about you being offered the chance of training? You kept it quiet about having a law degree.’

‘It was a very long time ago, Judy. And, as a matter of interest how do you know all this?’

Judy touched her nose. ‘Friends in high places.’

‘Like Maureen? The chairman’s secretary.’

‘As I said. Friends in high places. God, you must be absolutely thrilled.’

‘Of course. I can’t tell you how excited I am.’

‘But, I suppose, there is one fly in the ointment. Simon.’

‘Yes, he’s already stated he’ll block my way. She looked at her watch.

‘God, is that the time? I really must get back.’

‘Give the Fuhrer my regards,’ said Judy.

Helen walked back along the corridor to her office. She had to admit that there were actually two flies in the ointment and the second one was equally unpredictable. Tonight she’d have to tell William of her future plans.

D.I.Nicholls and D.S. Kate Davidson accompanied by two uniformed police constables knocked on Reg’s door. After a few moments the door opened slightly.

‘Mr Reg Perkins?’ said D I Nicholls.

‘Yes,’ replied Reg. ‘And who wants to know?’

‘D.I Nicholls,’ he said, showing his warrant card. ‘And this is D.S. Davidson.’

Reg nodded and looked at the four of them on his doorstep.

‘Can we come in, Mr Perkins? We’d like to speak to you.’

Reg stood to one side and let them into the kitchen.

D.I. Nicholls stared at Reg. ‘We are investigating the disappearance of a local student, Emily Carson. Can you tell us your whereabouts on Tuesday the 5th?’

Reg placed his fingers to his forehead as if thinking deeply. ‘Ah yes. I came in from work about nine. I work nights you see. Then I was here at the flat for the rest of the day.’

The D.I. nodded. Reg moved awkwardly and leaned against the cooker. ‘I went to bed, slept until the afternoon, then watched a bit of TV.’ He watched D.S. Davidson leave the kitchen and started to feel nervous. Beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

‘I see,’ said the D.I. So how come it has been reported you were seen arriving home later that afternoon in a rushed state?’

Reg was just about to answer when D.S.Davidson returned to the kitchen. ‘Guv, you’d better come and have a look at this.’

He followed her to the spare bedroom and scanned the photographs on the wall. ‘Christ, just look at this bloody lot.’ He cast his eyes down to the bottom row and saw the pictures of Emily. He returned to the kitchen. ‘OK Reg. We’re taking you down to the station for questioning.’

‘About what?’ said Reg. ‘I haven’t done anything.’

‘Let’s just say at this stage you are helping us with our enquiries.’ The two uniformed policemen took him out to the car.

The D.I. turned to D.S.Davidson. ‘OK, organize a search warrant and get forensics to go over this place with a fine tooth comb. I want to nail this bastard as soon as possible.’

In the Blue Fox Wine Bar Patrick drank his third glass of Australian Chablis and was starting to feel quite mellow. At least, he thought, I’m out of the way of that

damn bookie and his heavies. A glance at his watch told him it was 7pm. He made his way across the road to the Gaumont. In front of him in the ticket queue were a young couple discussing which seats to go buy. The girl looked sulky.

‘Why do we always have to sit in the front stalls? The balcony would be so much nicer.’

‘The balcony is much more expensive. I’m not made of money,’ replied her boyfriend.

Eventually they decided on the stalls and Patrick had now reached the desk. He was just about to buy his ticket when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

‘Wotcha,’ cried the voice. He turned to see Margaret behind him.

‘What are you doing here? I thought you’d seen this film.’

‘It’s a different film tonight. They change the programme each week.’

‘Oh I see.’

‘It’s another Bond film. *From Russia with Love*.’

He noticed she was wearing a spotted dress that emphasized her large hips.

‘So,’ she said. ‘We might as well sit together. If you get the tickets I’ll buy us some sweets.’

As they entered the auditorium the adverts had already started. He found their seats as Margaret, carrying two large tubs of popcorn and several bags of sweets, followed behind.

‘Dig in,’ she said, handing him his popcorn.

He cautiously looked round hoping that he’d see no one he knew. Thank Christ for that, he thought, when all the faces he saw were strangers. The idea of

being seen out with Margaret filled him with horror. Soon the adverts finished and they settled down to watch the film.

After the performance, Patrick opened the passenger seat door for Margaret.

‘This is really good of you to run me home. I thought I’d be getting the bus.’

‘Seat belt?’ he said, as he started the engine.

She struggled to find it. He reached across to retrieve it, catching a whiff of her strong flowery perfume. He clicked the belt into place.

He pulled out into the traffic and stopped at the lights on the main street. Two young girls in short skirts and cropped tops crossed the road.

Margaret squealed. ‘Good God, look at those two. They’ll catch their death in those thin clothes in this weather.’

‘At that age,’ said Patrick, waiting for the lights to change, ‘they probably don’t care.’ He noticed that the blonde one had amazing legs that seemed to go on forever. It reminded him of Kirsty. But since he’d made a pass at her in the taxi coming home from the party she’d avoided him completely.

‘Lights on green,’ shouted Margaret, interrupting his fantasy. ‘And if you ask me,’ said Margaret, ‘those young girls would be much better off if they wore vests. It’s madness to have bare midriffs on these chilly nights.’

Patrick smiled to himself. He started to imagine what Margaret’s underwear would be like. Sensible knickers. A double gusset no doubt.

‘Turn right here,’ she said. ‘It’s third house on the left.’

He pulled up outside the 1930s semi. It was, he noted, exactly the type of house he’d envisaged her living in. The bay window had net curtains and the

green paint on the front door was peeling. It looked neglected. Very similar to Margaret, he thought.

‘Well this is me,’ she said, struggling with the seat belt before getting out of the car. ‘I’ll see you to the door,’ he said, getting out of the driver’s seat.

‘Oh. What a perfect gentleman,’ she said.

He walked behind her up the gravel path to the front door. She got out her key and placed it in the lock and levered it open. ‘Fancy a drink? I’ve got some bottles of red.’

‘Is the Pope Catholic?’ he said, and followed her into the hallway.

‘Go into the front room and switch on the electric fire.’

The room smelt musty. The furniture was faded. He bent down and switched on the bars of the electric fire.

‘Here we are,’ she said, carrying a tray with a bottle of wine and glasses.

An hour later and having gone through several bottles of wine Patrick felt extremely mellow. Margaret, he discovered, had a wicked sense of humour and had made him laugh with her repertoire of filthy jokes. She was now completely blotto and lolling on the sofa like a beached whale.

He leaned across and kissed her hand. ‘Margaret you are a lovely lady.’

‘Thank you,’ she said. She pulled him towards her and placed a long wet kiss on his lips. He started to respond and touched her breasts through her blouse. ‘Let’s go upstairs,’ she said. She led the way up the narrow stairs. He followed with a bottle of wine and two glasses.

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D.I. Nicholls and D. S. Davidson sat opposite Reg and the duty solicitor in the interview room. Nichols stared at the suspect with his unkempt appearance who was lighting a cigarette. Nicholls was a hard man and familiar with interviews. He knew how to repeat questions, tune in to a suspect's personality, and finally weaken all resources before going in for the kill. It had stood him in good stead and he got results. 'So Reg,' he said. 'Let's go over the story again.'

'Look I've told you everything I know. Why won't you believe me?' he replied his voice starting to tremble.

'Because,' said D.I. Nicholls, leaning back in his seat and crossing his legs, 'things get missed. Forgotten. Now we need to know everything that happened on the day Emily went missing. You see, Reg, it's like piecing together a jigsaw. But at the moment there are several bits missing and I want to complete the puzzle as quickly as possible.'

Reg moved uncomfortably in his seat and avoided making eye contact.

'Now let's go over everything again. You went to the park that day to specifically take photographs of Emily?'

'No. I went hoping to see her. I didn't know if she'd be there.'

'But you took your camera along just in case?'

'I always take my camera with me.'

'Yes photographing girls in the park seems to be your main hobby.

We've seen the pictures in your flat.'

'No harm in what I do.'

'But it was different with Emily wasn't it?'

‘No. I only wanted to take pictures. Like I said no harm in that.’

‘But things went wrong didn’t they. She spotted you. She approached you. And that blew your cover. Suddenly these secret fantasies were to be made public. You panicked didn’t you, Reg? You had to stop her for good.’

‘No!’ he shouted. ‘It was all innocent. Yes she approached me. But I just ran off. Why won’t you believe me?’ he said, hiding his face in his hands and starting to sob.

‘I think,’ said the solicitor, closing his notepad and placing the top on his fountain pen, ‘that my client needs a break at this point.’

D.I. Nicholls looked at the clock on the wall. ‘For the purposes of the tape the interview is suspended at 11.10,’ he said, and pressed the stop button.

The two CID officers left Reg still sobbing in the interview room and went to the room next door and watched him through the two way glass. D.I. Nicholls rubbed his face with the back of his hand. ‘What do you think, Davidson?’

‘Well he’s either a very good liar and as guilty as hell or just a grubby little pervert that happened to be in the vicinity at the time.’

‘You’re right,’ he said, stretching himself to his full six foot two height. ‘But at the moment he’s all we’ve got.’

Helen was preparing a file for the Jones vs Jones case when Simon opened the door and stood with his arms folded.

‘Can I ask you what on earth you think you are doing?’

She looked up. 'At this precise moment I'm making up this file for Bernard.'

'Don't be so facetious,' he said. The pale blue shirt he wore beneath his red braces was immaculate and without any sign of a crease.

'I'm afraid I don't know what you mean.'

'You mean you don't know what facetious means?'

She stapled a report together and put it in the folder on her desk. 'Yes I know what facetious means. And did you know the word has all the vowels in the right order?'

'What!'

'A, e, i, o, u, in that order. Clever isn't it?'

He stepped into the office and shut the door. He pushed his reading glasses further up the bridge of his nose. 'What I'm referring to is your name has suddenly appeared on the board meeting register. How has this happened?'

'Well I imagine Bernard put it there. Is that a problem?'

He placed his hands on his hips. 'May I remind you that you are just a junior? The only use you will be at the meeting is to fetch the coffee.'

'Ah yes. Strong with two sugars if I remember rightly.'

His jaw stiffened. 'I told you I'd make your life difficult. And this is only the start believe me.'

She put the file in her brief case and snapped the clasp shut. 'I'm off now. Anything else you want to argue over before I leave?'

He grimaced. 'You haven't heard the last of this,' he said. He turned and slammed the door on his way out.

After a busy day at work preparing reports for Bernard, Helen finally got home to Church Close. She checked through the post and poured herself a much needed glass of wine. The last week had brought so many changes. She'd set off as a P.A. daunted by the thought of travelling to London on business and returned a trainee solicitor with a definite future. The chilled wine helped her relax and as she poured herself a second glass she heard a key in the lock and familiar steps along the hallway. She looked up as William came through to the kitchen. He put down his brief case and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. 'Welcome home,' he said, fetching a glass and helping himself to the wine. 'So tell me everything. How did it go?'

'The trip or the case?' she said, finding herself surprised by his sudden interest. Particularly as they'd parted on such acrimonious terms.

'Both,' he said. 'And don't leave anything out.'

'Well, the firm lost the court case.'

'I see.'

'Inevitable really. The judge felt a child should be with her mother.'

He drained his glass and poured himself another. 'And London? Did you get to see much of it?'

'Actually yes. There were a few gaps in the timetable. I'd forgotten what a lovely city it is. I went to the Victoria and Albert Museum and also did some shopping.'

She stood up and went over to the fridge opening the double doors and looking inside. 'What do you fancy for dinner? We've plenty in.'

‘Nothing for me. I’m afraid I have to go out again. A meeting about this possible takeover. Sorry.’

‘It’s okay,’ she said. ‘I’ll just rustle up something for myself and have an early night. I feel quite tired after the trip.’

‘You do that,’ he said. ‘I can imagine how hard you’ve been working.’

She couldn’t help noticing how different he seemed. More relaxed. More content. She decided, while he was in this good mood, to offload the bombshell she was sitting on. She returned to the table and sat down. ‘William. I’ve got something to tell you.’

‘What’s that?’ he said, taking his diary out of his jacket pocket and flicking through the pages.

‘I’ve been offered a chance to train as a solicitor with the firm.’

He looked up from his diary. ‘And how do you feel about it?’

‘I want to take it. Of course it will mean a lot of hard work. But I know I can do it.’

‘Well you’ve never been afraid of hard work. And you’re already half way there with your law degree.’

‘A very out of date law degree. But yes, it has certainly helped.’

He closed his diary and put it back in his jacket pocket. ‘So what happens now?’

‘Not sure.’

‘If you want to take this opportunity, Helen, I think you should.’

‘But I thought you hated the idea of me working full time?’

He picked up his briefcase. ‘I was just going through a rough patch at work. I felt I couldn’t handle any more changes.’

‘And now?’

‘Now it’s different,’ he said, giving her a kiss on the cheek. ‘Don’t wait up for me I may be late.’

‘No, I won’t.’ She felt elated that the row she was expecting had not taken place. Perhaps the future now looked rosy.

Fifteen minutes later William pulled up outside Celia’s flat. From the boot of his car he took out a bouquet of red roses and ran up the two flights of stairs to her door. A feeling of excitement flooded his system as he rang the bell and heard footsteps in the hall. She opened the door wearing a silk dressing gown that he could see covered nothing more than her naked body.

She took the roses from him and placed them to her nose. ‘They are absolutely beautiful, William.’ She smiled. ‘I’ve prepared something to eat. Shall we go through to the lounge?’

‘Maybe later,’ he said. He took her face in his hands and kissed her passionately. He then picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

Donna stood looking out of her apartment window where the lights of the town seemed to stretch forever. It had been another long day at the store – customers came and went, but overall it had been uneventful. When she got in from work her feet were aching, but after a long soak in the bath she felt refreshed. She pulled her dressing gown around her and sipped her wine.

Until recently she’d missed having another person in her life. There was no one to come home to. But now her thoughts were only of Sophia. A feeling

of warmth ran through her body as she pictured Sophia's long hair sweeping across her shoulders and her slim figure. She wanted her so badly but she'd purposely left it three days since their first kiss before making contact again. At first she thought the Millstone Hotel would be the perfect venue for dinner – elegant and classy. Then she had the idea of inviting Sophia to her own apartment where the private atmosphere would be more relaxed. And it would be discreet.

She picked up the receiver and dialled the number. After several rings Sophia picked up the phone.

'2147869'

Donna took a deep breath. 'Hello Sophia, this is Donna speaking. I must thank you once again for taking me to the gallery the other evening. I enjoyed it so much. I was wondering, by way of a thank you, if you'd accept an invitation for dinner at my place on Thursday.'

'I'd love to,' replied Sophia. 'What time?'

'About 8 o'clock.'

'Wonderful. I'll see you then. Bye.'

Donna put down the receiver and got out her notebook. This meal was going to be very special. After all it was the start of a new romance.

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Reg sat opposite the two detectives. His face was that of a tired man and in the last twenty four hours he seemed to have aged ten years. He stared straight ahead.

D.I. Nicholls spent a few moments reading some notes in a file, occasionally raising an eyebrow and sighing slightly. He looked up at Reg. 'So, let's go over the details again shall we.'

Reg held his head in his hands. 'I've told you everything I know. Why won't you believe me? I didn't touch that girl.'

'That's your story, Reg. But see it from our point of view. You were in the park. You were most probably the last person to see Emily before she disappeared. This girl is eighteen. She has her whole life ahead of her. Where is she, Reg?'

'I've told you all I know.'

'But have you, Reg? You see when we searched your house we found numerous photographs of girls you'd snapped in the park. Including, I may add, four pictures of Emily. So you see, Reg, it doesn't look good, does it?'

Reg sobbed, hiding his face from view. The duty solicitor placed a hand on his shoulder and looked at D.I. Nicholls. 'My client, as you can see, is getting very tired. You have to charge him or let him go. You can't keep him here much longer,' he said, looking at his watch.

D.I. Nicholls raised his eyebrows. It was time to go for the jugular. He sat up straight and grew taller in his chair. 'Let me put it to you, Reg, that you were

goaded by this young girl. Your cover was blown and she threatened to go to the police.’

‘No. It wasn’t like that.’

D.I. Nicholls appeared not to be listening to any replies. ‘She would have put a stop to your park visits, wouldn’t she? Your game would have been up. You’d have had to revert to the girly mags we found in your wardrobe. And that wouldn’t be as good.’

‘I didn’t do anything,’ interrupted Reg.

But D.I. Nicholls was in full flow. ‘You followed that girl to shut her up.’

‘No,’ protested Reg. ‘It’s not true.’

‘You found yourself in a difficult position didn’t you? Come on, tell us what really happened.’

Reg looked at his solicitor and then at the two CID officers.

The D.I., with beads of sweat on his forehead, felt he was on the verge of cracking this man. The adrenaline was flowing. He wanted the truth.

Reg met the eyes of the D.I. with a look of defeat on his face. ‘I want to tell you something’

The D.I. leaned forward. ‘Go on Reg. I’m waiting.’

But a sudden knock at the door broke his flow as D.S. Hollins stepped in.

‘WHAT!’ shouted D.I. Nicholls, his face bright red with fury at being interrupted.

‘Guv. You’d better come outside.’

D.S. Davidson looked at the clock. ‘For the purpose of the tape D.I. Nicholls is leaving the interview room at 09.20.’

Outside in the corridor the D.I. glowered at D.S. Hollins. 'This had better be good. He was just about to crack.'

'The girl's been found.'

'Alive?'

'Yes. Turns out she went away with a girlfriend for a few days. Didn't bother to tell anyone. Didn't read any newspapers.'

'Thank Christ,' he sighed. He returned to the interview room and whispered in D.S. Davidson's ear. She looked at Reg. 'Don't think you've got away with your filthy habit of watching and photographing young girls in the park. Do you understand what I'm saying?'

Reg avoided eye contact and looked down at his dirty nails. 'Yes I understand.'

'I hope you also realise that going to the park is now a no go area for you. Is that clear?'

'Yes,' he said.

She stood up from the desk. 'You're free to go. We won't be needing you anymore.'

Helen waited in the senior partner's outer office. His PA, a neat little woman, was engrossed in some figures on her computer screen. She jotted down information onto a pad and kept referring to it, occasionally adding more material. The internal phone buzzed and she pressed a button on the machine. 'Yes.'

'Tell Mrs Patterson to come in, will you?'

She looked up over her glasses. 'You can go in now.'

Helen knocked on the door and entered. Bernard Kramer, a giant of a man, seemed to fill the small office. He greeted her with an outstretched hand. 'Come and sit down, Helen. I'm just about to have a coffee. Can I offer you one?'

'Thank you.' Milk and no sugar.

He poured the coffee from the percolator on a side desk and handed her a cup. He then sat in his chair and leaned back. 'So, Helen, I've been hearing a lot of good things about you from Gerry. He's given you a glowing reference. But you realise you have a lot of hard work ahead of you.'

'Yes, I do. And I'm very keen to start.'

'Good,' he said. 'Now how is this training going to fit in with your home life?'

'No problem,' she said. 'Our daughter has left home. I have plenty of time on my hands. And I want to grasp this opportunity or I will always regret it.'

Helen noticed him looking at her. She hoped she was making the right impression. That she was committed and serious about the job.

He leaned forward in his chair. 'You can start by shadowing me. I'll actually be grateful of any assistance as I'm snowed under with work at the moment.' He took another sip of his coffee and then put his cup back on the saucer. 'How does that sound?'

'Excellent,' she said. 'I can't thank you enough for giving me this opportunity.'

‘It’s Gerry that’s rooting for you. You need to thank *him* not me,’ he said, getting up out of his chair. He held out his hand. ‘Welcome aboard, Helen.’

She left the office and walked down the corridor feeling eight feet tall. She was so grateful to Gerry for opening this window of opportunity in her world. She would not let anyone down.

For Patrick pay day had arrived at long last. He would now be able to pay off the some of the debt he owed to Jackson the local bookie. At least, he thought, handing over a few hundred quid would keep the heavies from his door. He went to the bank and found the ATM machine was out of order so he queued at the counter. A young boy with several bags of change was holding everyone up. He disagreed with the scales and the cashier had to open several bags to check the contents. A young child further ahead in the queue stared at him sullenly. Patrick stuck out his tongue and the child looked away. Eventually he got served and cashed his cheque. On his way up the road he approached a new betting office that had opened only a week before. The familiar sound of voices and a television blasting out made him stop. He entered through the open door and placed two hundred pounds on Royal Child that was running in the 2.30 at Doncaster. He’d had a bad week with orders at work. Then followed the disastrous night with Margaret. It couldn’t get much worse. But when this horse won it would wipe out all his debts.

Margaret had spent the day thinking of Patrick. Last night he had been so attentive. And the passion they'd both felt in the bedroom had somehow cemented their relationship. She felt like a real woman. Now, as she sat on the top deck of the bus on the way to the hospital, she kept looking at her reflection in the window and smiling at herself. She'd decided not to tell people yet about her new relationship. It would be their secret for a little while. But it would not be long before he would be on her arm as a permanent fixture at events.

She got off the bus at St. Mary's hospital and made her way down the corridor to Ward six. Sister Jeffreys was coming in the opposite direction and stopped. 'Ah, Miss Haddock. I believe Dr Plant wants a word with you. He's actually in my office at the moment. Follow me.'

'Anything wrong?' asked Margaret.

'No not at all. In fact he's got some good news for you.'

Margaret followed her into the small office and sat down. Dr Plant looked up from his file and smiled. 'Your mother,' he said, 'has made good progress. In fact I'm ready to release her.'

'Release her?' said Margaret, taken aback by the suddenness of the situation.

'Yes, she can go home the day after tomorrow. We'll make arrangements for the district nurse to call. Also we'll send in the occupational therapist and there will be visits from the physiotherapist.'

Margaret cleared her throat. 'You do realise I'm out at work all day.'

'Yes we do. But you'll get plenty of support from social services.'

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Sophia finished her tiramisu and sat back in her chair. 'That was a delicious meal, Donna. You really are a wonderful cook.'

'Go and sit by the fire and I'll bring in the coffee and brandies.'

She sank into the beige leather sofa and adjusted her red dress so that it covered her knees. She looked round the sitting room with its subtle shades of beige and black. She could feel the heat pumping from the gas fire and this combined with several glasses of wine resulted in her feeling extremely relaxed. Her new red stiletto shoes pinched slightly but getting a taxi home would mean no walking.

Donna came in with a tray. 'Here we are,' she said. 'I always believe a meal should be finished off with three things. A strong cup of coffee and a good brandy.'

'What's the third?' asked Sophia, leaning forward to pick up her cup.

Donna laughed. 'A good woman.'

Sophia blushed and busied herself by stirring her coffee and taking a sip. 'Mmm, now that really is a good cup.'

The heat from the fire was making her feel hot and she took off her bolero. 'I'm so glad that you enjoyed the trip to the gallery. I hope the Pre-Raphaelite exhibition was a good place to start.'

Donna moved closer on the sofa. 'It was an excellent choice. Do you know,' she said, sliding her hand along the back of Sophia's neck and feeling the warm soft skin, 'you couldn't have made a better choice.'

'Now that is good to hear. What was it you particularly liked?'

‘It was the history behind the whole movement. I have great admiration for breakaway groups. It takes courage – especially at that time in history.’ She ran her other hand across Sophia’s leg.

‘I agree,’ said Sophia, draining the last drops of her coffee.

‘The thing I like,’ said Donna, moving her hand to the front of Sophia’s neck and stroking it gently, ‘is their total belief in their own ability.’

‘Yes, despite the pressure they must have been under to conform,’ replied Sophia. She leaned forward to replace her cup on the tray. ‘I really should be going soon. It’s getting late.’

‘But you don’t *want* to go. Do you?’

‘I’m not actually sure why I’m here at all.’

‘Oh I think you do.’

Sophia met her gaze. ‘I’m not sure what you mean by’ but as Donna’s lips met hers the sentence trailed off.

Donna slowly undid the buttons on the front of Sophia’s dress. ‘This is why you are here,’ she said, as she felt the soft material of her bra. ‘You like me doing that don’t you,’ said Donna, ‘and I believe you want more.’

‘Do I?’ she whispered.

‘Yes.’ She undid Sophia’s bra and exposed her breasts. They were full and round. They felt warm as her fingers explored them, the nipples hardening in arousal. Donna placed kisses on each of the breasts let her tongue run down the cleavage.

Margaret watched the occupational therapist transform the living room for Grace's return. Blocks were put beneath the easy chair, a trolley with wheels was left in the hall, and a commode placed in the lounge. 'Now then,' said the therapist, a young red headed girl in her twenties, 'I think you'll find this works very well. Your mother will be very comfortable here.'

'Right,' replied Margaret, looking around the room that now resembled the sterility of a hospital ward.

'The important thing is that your mother's welfare comes first. We can only do so much, but the rest has to come from you. She needs a lot of love.'

Margaret smiled politely. Yes, she thought, and I'm the poor sod that's got to wipe her arse as well.

'If there are any problems just give me a ring.'

'I will' said Margaret, seeing her out. She returned to the room and sat on the bed. The bed that from tomorrow Grace would be occupying, handing out orders and complaining about everything she did.

She thought about Patrick. She hadn't seen him since their night together but the memory still filled her thoughts. He had made her feel so special. She went to the hall, looked up his number in the directory and dialled. It rang several times but there was no answer. Just hearing his deep voice would make her feel better. She switched on the television and started to watch the Benny Box quiz show. She found herself laughing as an elderly gentleman kept interrupting when it was not his turn. After it was finished she tried Patrick's number again. There was no reply. She just wanted to speak to him. To tell him how much she enjoyed their night together.

‘He’s bound to ring later,’ she thought, as she went to the pantry and took a bottle of wine from the shelf and poured herself a large glass. There was an old black and white film starting on BBC2. She settled down to watch it with the bottle of wine by her side. Thirty minutes later the film was blaring from the television, the bottle of wine was empty, and Margaret was oblivious to the world around her.

Helen was on her way to a lunch engagement and popped into the ladies to repair her make-up. She was just applying lipstick when she felt a sharp pain in her stomach. For a moment she thought she was going to be sick but was relieved when it passed, so she set off for Oscar’s Wine Bar. She spotted Verity at a corner table waving furiously. ‘Helen, lovely to see you,’ she said, giving her a quick peck on the cheek and patting the seat for her to sit on.

‘Sorry I’m late, Verity. It’s been a very busy morning.’

‘Simon playing up as usual?’

‘You got it in one. I was just on my way out when he wanted a file from the archives. He insisted on me getting it before lunch.’

Verity stared at Helen. ‘I don’t know what you’ve done to yourself but you seem to be brimming with confidence. Do tell.’

Helen caught the attention of the waiter. ‘A glass of dry white wine please and whatever my friend is having.’

‘A gin and tonic,’ said Verity, watching the waiter return to the bar. She turned to Helen. ‘Come on. Tell all.’

‘Well, you know I’ve just been to London on a child custody case.’

‘Yes.’

‘So while I was there I met and had dinner with Gerry.’

‘Gerry?’

‘Senior partner with the London office.’

‘I see.’

The waiter arrived with their drinks and put them on the table.

Helen picked up the menu. ‘Oh dear I haven’t even looked at it yet.’

Verity grabbed the menu from her and kept it in her hand. ‘Now let’s get back to your news. What about this Gerry?’

‘The upshot is he’s offered me the chance to train as a solicitor with the firm.’

Verity stared back. ‘My God that’s wonderful. I presume you’ll take it?’

‘Of course.’

The waiter came to their table. ‘Can I take your order ladies?’

‘I’ll have the poached salmon,’ said Helen, closing the menu.

‘I’ll have the lamb,’ added Verity.

Helen felt the pain in her tummy again and took a sharp breath in.

‘You alright?’ said Verity.

‘Yes fine. Just a bit of the gripes.’

‘So, what does William think about this training?’

‘Don’t ask me why but he’s changed his mind all of a sudden. The thing is, Verity, something seems to have changed in William when I was in London. Not sure what’s happened but I’m making the most of it.’

Celia entered Carrington's store through the revolving doors and found herself in the brightly lit cosmetics department. Everything about the place said class she thought. The store, first thing, was quiet. She could never imagine Carrington's if it was taken over by the American company. They would ruin it with their cheap, shoddy goods, and their pile it high and sell it fast reputation.

She went up in the lift to the lingerie department. Since starting her affair with William she had once again felt like a real woman and been able to show off her body. She looked through the items on the rails and decided on a basque and thong in black with red trimmings. These would please William. Helen, she thought, was obviously a sheepish woman. She just didn't understand William. He needed someone more exciting. And once she moved into Church Close she'd make him happier than he'd ever been.

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The word pervert was scrawled in red paint on the door as Reg got back to his flat. He noticed a net curtain twitch next door as he reached for his key. There was no doubt in his mind that Eric had phoned the police. No one else but him had been in the flat. And, he thought, it would take a nosy sod like him to raise the alarm. It was an action that, no doubt Eric hadn't realised in his haste, would now have repercussions forever. He let himself in and started to make a mug of tea, but on discovering only a quarter carton of sour milk in the fridge, changed his mind.

The flat, so quiet after the police presence a few days ago, showed the evidence of their search. Drawers and cupboards were strewn across the floor. Beds were stripped and mattresses tossed onto the ground. But worst of all the walls in the spare bedroom were bare. Gone were all his treasured photographs. How, he wondered, would he fill his days? He couldn't go to the park any more. And people at work were talking about him. He glanced out of the window at the garden next door. Eric had made himself scarce since the arrest. 'The fucking toad,' he thought. I'll get that bastard even if it takes forever.

Margaret pushed the tea trolley along the corridor towards the meeting room. On it she'd set out flasks of tea and coffee and a plate of biscuits. She stopped when one of the front wheels locked. Upon inspection she saw a piece of cellotape stuck to it. She bent down and pulled at the sticky tape but it was stuck on tightly and she had to get down on her knees and scrape at it with her finger

nails to loosen it. While still struggling she heard Patrick's voice coming from the open door of Toby's office.

He was laughing. 'We were both pissed. But I still don't know what made me do it.'

'So come on,' said Toby, 'you still haven't told me what she was like to shag.'

Patrick cleared his throat. 'Let's just say it was easy.'

'Not much foreplay then?'

'The foreplay was the wine.'

'It obviously did the trick?'

'Yeah, it softened her up. I just told her she was an attractive woman.'

Toby roared with laughter. 'And the stupid bitch actually believed you?'

Margaret had now freed the tape from the trolley wheel. She stood and listened.

'Yeah,' said Patrick. 'It seemed to turn her on. But believe me the sight of her naked on that bed was not a turn on for me. All those layers of fat wobbling about.'

'So what did you think of while you were pounding away?'

'A blonde girl I'd spotted in the cinema. She was a real babe.'

Margaret felt her eyes filling with tears as she pushed the trolley forwards. At that moment Patrick came out of the office and nearly bumped into her. She noticed his body stiffen and he avoided her eyes.

William drove fast along the country lanes passing fields and farmhouses on the way. Celia relaxed into the cream leather seat beside him. 'William, this is such an adventure. But you must tell me where we are going.'

He smiled as he glanced across at her. 'I've told you it's a secret. We are having two nights away. Somewhere to relax and be ourselves.'

'Away from prying eyes you mean?'

'Exactly. I want to show you off. I'm so proud of you.' His hands relaxed on the steering wheel as he leaned back in his seat. He pressed the accelerator hard and headed north entering the next county where the scenery became flatter with fields surrounded by neatly trimmed hedges. A row of black and white thatched cottages came into sight at the side of the road. She stroked his arm and closed her eyes. She felt very content.

After a few miles he pulled off the road and swung the car up a long gravel drive.

'Here we are,' he said.

She opened her eyes and looked up at the ivy clad hotel.

He turned off the engine. 'The Three Pheasants. What do you think?'

She glanced at the large country house with its oak door and bay trees either side. 'William. It looks magnificent. Very classy.'

'Only good enough for my classy lady,' he replied, leaning across and kissing her on the lips. He pulled away examining her face. 'I want this to be a really relaxing break. There are some lovely country walks I'm told, the food is excellent, and we've got the bridal suite.'

'Oh William,' she whispered, and gently stroked his face.

He took hold of her hand and kissed the palm gently. 'You are the perfect woman, Celia. I'm so lucky to have you. Do you have any idea how much you've changed my life?'

She squeezed his hand. 'And have *you* any idea how happy you've made me?'

'Let's register and get settled in.' He took their cases from the boot of the car and slammed down the lid firmly. They walked up the steps to the hotel and approached the reception desk. He rang the bell on the counter.

A young girl came through from the back office. 'Can I help you, sir?'

'Yes,' said William. 'I've made a reservation for two nights.' He watched as she opened the black leather bound book on the desk.

'What name is it?'

'Mr and Mrs Patterson,' he replied, adopting a confident stance at the counter. He winked at Celia and grinned like a naughty school boy having got away with stealing apples. The more he got to know her the more he liked her. And the strange thing was, he thought, announcing themselves as Mr and Mrs Patterson did not feel odd at all.

Helen arrived home from the office after a busy day clearing her desk and settling in the new P.A. – a young woman called Tara who had arrived with excellent credentials and wearing a very professional black business suit. The handover had gone well. Now feeling tired she opened the front door, picked up the post from the mat and wandered into the kitchen to pour herself a glass of chilled Chablis. With William being away for a couple of days on some course

she'd enjoy having the house to herself and it would have the added bonus of giving her time to look through the paper work from Bernard. She switched on the BBC news, put up her feet and soon slipped into a much needed nap. An hour later she woke with a sharp pain in her stomach. She felt sick and as she got up to go to the toilet her legs went weak.

She made herself a cup of hot milk and went upstairs. A good sleep, she thought, would do her good. She just wished William was here.

Celia sliced through her sirloin steak. 'Now that's what I call a magnificent piece of meat.'

'Didn't I tell you everything this weekend is going to be perfect? Just you and me and that huge bed upstairs. What more could we ask for?'

'What indeed,' she whispered, putting mustard on her sirloin and placing a small piece in her mouth.

'I thought,' said William, wiping his mouth with his napkin, 'we might attempt the five mile woodland walk they recommend in the hotel brochure. I've checked the weather forecast and it's going to be dry.'

'Wonderful. I've packed my walking shoes. So no problem.'

'Excellent,' he said, taking her hand in his. 'You really do think of everything.'

The waiter cleared away their dishes and placed a dessert menu on the table.

'Oh dear,' she said. 'I've no room for a sweet.'

'Coffee?'

‘No. I’m fine,’ she said, waving her hand.

‘In that case,’ he said, standing up, ‘let’s get a couple of large brandies and take them up to the room.’

‘Good idea. I’ll go on ahead.’

He watched her make her way to the lift. No one, he thought, can wear high heels like she can. She really does have the most magnificent legs.

Upstairs in the bridal suite Celia had taken a quick shower and applied perfume between her bare breasts. She pulled back the embroidered bedspread to reveal the white silk sheets and ran her hand across the shiny texture. She plucked a pink carnation from the bouquet that had been waiting upon their arrival and placed it in her hair. Then lay naked on the bed waiting for William’s arrival.

At 3 am Helen awoke in agony. The pain was unbearable. She didn’t attempt to get out of bed knowing she would never make it to the bathroom. She picked up the phone and dialled. After several rings she heard Verity’s sleepy voice.

‘Hello.’

‘Verity its Helen. I need help. I’m in agony. Can you come over?’

‘Of course. But first I’m calling an ambulance. This sounds a lot more serious than food poisoning. Stay exactly where you are. I’ll see to everything.’

Helen heard the line go dead and lay back in bed which she now realised was drenched in sweat and she was getting hotter. Verity arrived at Church Close at the same time as the ambulance. She let herself in and raced up to the bedroom. ‘Helen, my dear. Just relax the medics are here.’

She tried to sit up but cried with the pain.

‘Don’t try to speak,’ said Verity. But by the time Helen was put in the ambulance she was unconscious.

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Margaret put her key in the door and stepped into the dark hallway. It was deadly quiet and the silence signalled that Grace was in one of her bad moods. The evening ahead of her, she knew, would be hell. She hung up her coat and glancing in the mirror noticed that her new hairstyle was now struggling to keep its appeal. Stray pieces stood up in different directions. Her thoughts were interrupted by Grace's loud voice.

‘Where the hell have you been? I’ve been dying for a pee for ages. Get me on the commode quickly.’

Margaret put her hands around Grace's waist and took the full weight of her mother to lift her onto the commode. ‘There you go,’ she said.

‘Not before time. I nearly wet my pants, I’ll have you know. Where in God’s name have you been until now?’

‘Working. And then the bus was late. Apparently there’s been some sort of incident on the motorway and there were huge traffic jams created on the roads through town.’

‘Typical,’ said Grace, signalling to be lifted back onto her wheel chair. ‘Too many bloody trucks on the roads these days if you ask me. Not like it was in my day where people didn’t have cars and everyone walked to where they wanted to go.’

‘Mother! We’ve been over this so many times. You have to realise the world is a different place now.’

‘Corner shops have gone,’ said Grace, not listening. ‘I used to rely on Mr Roberts’ grocery store. It had everything. Now we have those damn

supermarkets. Those trolleys are lethal. The last time I went to one of those places some woman ran into my ankle. Nearly broke the damn thing.'

Margaret grinned. 'The trolley or the ankle?'

'My ankle of course. And don't be so damn clever.'

Margaret pushed the wheel chair to the table. 'It's toad in the hole tonight. You like that.'

'I'm not that hungry.'

'What did you have from Meals on Wheels at lunchtime?'

'Shepherd's pie,' she said. 'And damn good it was too. Rita was early today so came in and put it on a plate for me.'

'That was good of her, mother.'

'She asked to use the loo. That's the only reason she came in.'

Margaret put mats on the table. 'Well they do good work. I'm sure her clients are very grateful.'

Grace laughed. 'She was telling me one of her male clients comes to the door completely naked.'

'I hope she averts her gaze,' laughed Margaret.

'Na. Knowing Rita she'd have a damn good look at his whatsit,' said Grace.

At nine o'clock Margaret, having prepared her mother for bed, returned to the living room and switched on the television. The channel was showing an old Benny Hill programme. She watched the sketches. But the comedy could not take away the sadness she felt. Her thoughts kept returning to Patrick. How could he be so cruel? He'd seemed so loving and attentive on their night

together. She'd thought he was attracted to her. Now she was left feeling humiliated. She went to the pantry and uncorked a litre bottle of red wine and poured herself a large glass. She drank it down in one before returning to the living room. Her existence, she knew, had returned to being at Grace's beck and call. She was never going to have a life of her own. Many glasses of wine later she felt quite sleepy. She staggered as she went up the stairs. She saw Grace's bedroom door was ajar and stepped inside. She watched her mother's chest moving up and down as she slept. This, she thought, is the one person standing between me and any sort of life. She picked up a pillow from the bedside chair and stood looking down at Grace.

William gave Celia a passionate kiss as he dropped her off at her flat. The weekend had been all he'd hoped for. They'd spent valuable time together, gone for long country walks, sat by roaring log fires in the lounge, eaten the most exquisite food, and made glorious love. Now he headed home to drop off his case and change for the day ahead at the store. He pulled up at Church Close and entered the hallway making his way to the kitchen. There was a message on the kitchen table from Verity.

William,

Ring me the moment you get in. Helen is in hospital.

Verity

He picked up the telephone and dialled Verity's number.

'Verity, its William. What has happened?'

'William, thank God you're home. No one knew where you were.'

'Where is Helen? And what's wrong?'

'St. Mary's hospital. Ward C.'

'*And?*' replied William, getting more anxious.

'Burst appendix. It was touch and go for a while. As you know when this happens it is only a matter of time. Thankfully they managed to operate quickly.' She cleared her throat. 'So where were you?'

'I was on a course.'

'But why didn't you leave a number?'

'I forgot.'

'That's not like you, William. You're normally so organised.'

'Yes,' he said, getting impatient at Verity's insistence on stating the bloody obvious, which was continuing to add to his feelings of guilt. 'Look Verity. Thanks for your help. I'm on my way to the hospital right now. Bye.'

He got in his car and drove to St Mary's. He found Ward C and was just entering when an overweight sister approached him and used her large frame to block his way. 'Can I help you? Visiting hours are not until this evening.'

'Yes,' he said, finding her manner curt and having the urge to push her out of the way. 'My wife Helen Patterson has been admitted. I was away at the weekend and only just heard. I'd like to see her.'

'I see,' she said, looking him up and down and inspecting his appearance. 'Well in that case you can go in. But,' she said, 'I have to warn you that Mrs Patterson has been very ill and is still under sedation. She will be very drowsy.'

‘Yes of course,’ he replied. ‘I’ll only stay a few minutes.’

‘Make sure you do,’ she responded, as if having the final word was always her prerogative.

He found Helen sleeping. She looked pale and weak. He stroked her hand and she opened her eyes.

‘Hello,’ she said.

‘I’m so sorry,’ he said.

‘What for?’

‘That I wasn’t with you when this happened. How are you feeling now?’

‘Certainly a lot better than Friday night. I thought it was food poisoning at first but then the pain got unbearable. I phoned Verity and she took care of everything.’

‘Yes I know. I’ve spoken to her this morning. We owe her a lot.’

‘We certainly do,’ she said, closing her eyes and slipping off to sleep.

William stayed for a while holding her hand until the ward sister appeared behind him and suggested he come back later. He did not argue. He knew he was with Helen where he belonged. Celia had been fun. But Helen was his wife.

Donna was waiting at the estate agents office as Sophia came in the front door.

They embraced lovingly.

‘Can I help you?’ said the young man behind the desk.

‘Yes,’ said Donna. ‘We are looking to buy a flat together.’

‘Do come into the office.’

They followed him into the small room and took seats at the desk.

‘Coffee?’ he said, walking to the table that housed a percolator.

‘Thank you,’ said Sophia.

He poured the drinks and put them on the desk. ‘There you go.’

Donna picked up the cup and warmed her hands around it.

‘So,’ he said, ‘what sort of thing are you looking for?’

‘Luxurious, good views, and close to the town centre.’

‘Bedrooms?’

‘Definitely one master suite for us. Possibly one or two others for guests.’

He looked up momentarily and then averted his eyes. Donna knew he’d cottoned on to their situation. But she didn’t care.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we have plenty to offer you. I’ll just go and get some brochures for you to look at.’

Sophia watched him opening a grey filing cabinet and taking out files. He returned to the office. ‘Now ladies, I’ve got some lovely properties here. Do have a look through them and see if anything suits. I’ll come back in about five minutes.’ He closed the door behind him.

Donna laughed loudly. ‘Poor sod he didn’t know where to look when I said we’d share the same bedroom.’ She picked up the brochures and started to look at the pictures and floor plans. ‘My God, some of these look wonderful.’

Sophia was studying a top floor apartment overlooking the park. ‘Now this looks the business. It has a private roof garden, room for my piano, and close to work for both of us.’

Donna leaned across. 'We'll certainly view that one.' She knocked on the glass partition and signalled to the young man to come back in. 'We like the look of this one. Can we view it this morning?'

He looked at the file and smiled. 'You're in luck. The owner is abroad. We have the key in the office. We can go straight away if that suits you.'

They looked at each other. 'Yes,' said Sophia, 'that suits us.'

The agent steered the car in the direction of the park and pulled up outside the block. 'Here we are.'

Donna looked up at the three storey building. It had a certain homely feel, the gardens were well kept and there were plenty of parking spaces. The three of them went up in the lift to the top floor and entered through the blue front door. Once inside they found the interior modern and minimalist. The lounge, kitchen and dining room were open plan. Donna looked out of the lounge window at the bowling green opposite. 'Lovely view of the park,' she said. 'Do come and look.'

Sophia walked across to the window and taking Donna's hand looked at the green park beyond the leafy lane.

'Absolutely stunning,' she said.

'Like to look at the bedrooms, ladies?' said the agent. 'Follow me.'

They walked along the narrow corridor.

'This will certainly impress you.' He opened the door and let them go in first. The room was enormous, housed a king sized bed, a dressing room, and en-suite with the largest Jacuzzi that Donna had ever seen. She looked around. 'No shower?'

'Behind you,' he said.

She turned and saw the double shower unit. 'How could I miss that?' she laughed. She looked at Sophia and grinned. 'Plenty of room in there for both of us, I think.'

'So,' he said. 'Seen enough, ladies?'

Donna took another look out of the window at the view across the park. 'Would you mind if we have a further look round on our own?'

'Not at all,' he said. 'This is a very important decision. I'll be down in the car when you're ready to leave.'

He let himself out of the door and they heard his footsteps on the stairs. Donna smiled at Sophia. 'Let's have another look at the bedroom.' She opened the door and looked around 'It's perfect. Just you and me in this wonderful apartment doing what we like, when we like.' She looked down at the king sized mattress. 'I feel like christening this bed right now.'

Sophia giggled. 'Well you'll have to wait.'

'I don't think so,' said Donna, grabbing hold of her and pushing her on the bed.

Sophia wriggled. 'Stop it he might come back and 'but Donna's lips were on hers and she returned the kiss. Donna undressed her slowly, taking pleasure as each item of clothing was removed until she was completely naked. She pulled Sophia to her and they made love, and then lay together for several minutes.

The agent was standing in the drive smoking a cigarette which he quickly put out when he saw them approaching. 'So,' he said. 'You like the place?'

Donna smiled. 'Yes, we think it will suit us very well.' She winked at Sophia. 'In fact we feel completely at home here already.'

Celia entered Langley's restaurant and looked round. She spotted Verity at a corner table.

She made her way towards her, sidestepping numerous tables, and gave her a peck on the cheek. 'Darling, lovely to see you.'

Verity looked closely at Celia. 'I must say that you are looking wonderful. What on earth have you been doing to yourself?'

Celia brushed her hand through her hair. 'I'm just a lot happier these days. Getting out more and meeting people.'

'I'm so glad. I was worried about you for quite a while. All alone in that flat' She raised her hand to attract the attention of a waiter who came over to the table. 'Can we have two coffees?'

'Certainly, madam,' he said, turning quickly from the table.

'So, Celia, the last time we met you were telling me that you'd met someone wonderful. I assume, judging by your appearance, that's still ongoing?'

'Yes it is. Honestly, Verity I've never felt so content. He's everything I have ever wanted in a man.'

The waiter approached their table and put a cafetiere of coffee on the table. 'There you go, ladies. Enjoy.'

Verity started to pour the coffee into the cups.

'The thing is,' sighed Celia, 'I've never felt so much in awe of another person in my life.'

Verity added some milk to her coffee and took a sip. 'Well you must tell me all about it. But first let me tell you about an incident that took place at the weekend.'

'What incident?'

'Do you remember William Patterson at the wedding? I think he sat next to you at the reception.'

'Yes.'

'Well his wife Helen was taken seriously ill last weekend. At first she thought it was food poisoning. Unfortunately it turned out to be much more serious. Burst appendix.'

Celia avoided eye contact.

'William was away on some course and hadn't left an address. Poor Helen was in the operating theatre fighting for her life and he, the silly man, could not be contacted.'

'Oh dear,' whispered Celia.

'The worst part is that Helen was starting her legal training today. Did I mention that she's gone back to work and is so highly thought of that they have offered to let her train as a solicitor with the firm?'

Celia took a sip of her coffee and frowned. 'But surely she's too old to train for a job like that?'

'Apparently not. But William's has always been dead set against it. A bit old fashioned. Anyway, do tell me about this new man in your life. I'm dying to hear about it.'

Celia looked at her watch and picked up her handbag. 'Actually, Verity, I'm in a bit of a rush.' She left the restaurant and went down in the lift ignoring

everyone around her. Why, she thought, did Helen have to be such a drama queen? It might be several days before William could get away and be with her again.

Margaret leapt out of bed when she realised she had not set the alarm but immediately felt the effects of a massive hangover. Her head ached and her mouth felt like the texture of the bottom of a parrot's cage. She stopped and sat on the side of the bed to recover. She then went downstairs to make two cups of tea. As she looked out of the kitchen window she saw there had been a heavy frost and the shed roof was white. The kettle was taking a long time to boil and she picked it up impatiently and slammed it down on the surface. But it continued to chug along at a snail's pace. The thought of a full day serving food in the canteen filled her with dread – particularly if Patrick came in for his lunch and she had to deal with him. Eventually the kettle boiled and she poured out the tea. She slowly climbed the stairs and went into Grace's room. Normally an early riser she was surprisingly still asleep. Margaret placed the tea on the bedside table. 'Come on mother it's late. Drink your tea and I'll come back to get you up'

She went to the bathroom, had a quick wash, cleaned her teeth and got dressed. Then she drank the luke warm tea before returning. She was surprised to find Grace still sleeping. She pulled back the bedclothes and shook her. 'Come on mother it's late. For God's sake I have to get you up or I'll never make it to work on time.' But Grace did not move. Margaret looked closely and

saw she was not breathing. When she touched her she felt cold. She must have been dead for several hours.

She stepped back and felt a feeling of panic rush through her body. She thought she was going to faint but sat down at the dressing table and steadied herself until the feeling had passed. She then called the doctor and rang the store to say she would not be in. She thought about the night before. She couldn't remember much except drinking too much wine and standing over her mother with a pillow.

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‘Take my hand,’ said William, as they walked down the hospital steps.

‘I’m fine,’ said Helen.

He placed her hand to his lips and kissed it. ‘Darling, I’m so sorry I was away when all this happened. Can you ever forgive me?’ How on earth, he thought, can I get over the guilt I feel?

As she got to the car he opened the door for her and fastened her seat belt. ‘There you go,’ he said, and walked round to his side and got in.

‘Comfortable?’ he asked.

‘William, I really am fine. There’s no need to fuss.’

He drove home slowly through the town passing Carrington’s on the main street and then along the leafy lanes before turning into Church Close. He got out to open the passenger door and offered a hand to help her. ‘Welcome home.’

She made her way to the kitchen and sat down while William took her case upstairs. The room had been tidied and a fresh smell of lemon lingered in the air. A bouquet of flowers lay on the table. She looked at the selection of pink roses and carnations and opened the card that was attached. To my darling Helen. Welcome home. Love William.

‘Now then,’ he said, coming into the kitchen, ‘you put your feet up and I’ll make a start on lunch. I’ve got a couple of salmon steaks. How does that sound?’

‘Fine,’ said Helen. ‘And thank you, William.’

‘For what?’

‘Taking the day off and bringing me home from hospital. I know how busy you must be what with the threat of this takeover.’

‘Not a problem,’ he replied, as he bent down to switch on the oven.

‘From now on you are my number one priority.’

In the afternoon as Helen was taking a nap William got in his car and drove over to Celia’s flat. He climbed the stairs and was just about to ring the bell when the door opened. Celia stood in the doorway looking elegant in black trousers and a satin blouse. A smile filled her face. ‘William. Do come in. I was getting anxious with not hearing from you.’

‘I’ll not stop long,’ he said. ‘Helen was taken ill last weekend. Burst appendix.’

‘Yes,’ replied Celia, leading him into the living room and sitting on one of the cream sofas. ‘Verity mentioned it when I met her for coffee. I’m sorry to hear about it. Now will you have a drink? I’ve got a very nice Rioca.’

He stood uneasily by the sofa. ‘No. As I said I’m not stopping.’

‘I see.’

‘Look the thing is I feel so damn guilty about what happened to Helen while I was away. She could easily have died.’

‘But darling you were not to know that this would happen. It is silly to blame yourself.’ She put her arms around him but he was tense and moved away slightly from her touch. ‘What’s wrong?’ she asked.

‘The truth is Celia that this affair between you and I has to end. I can’t do this any longer. I really can’t.’

He saw her complexion turn pale. 'Please don't do this, William. I really couldn't cope.' She grabbed hold of his arm and pulled him to her. 'We are so good together and you know I love you.'

He pushed her away. 'It's over Celia,' he said, as he made his way to the door and out of the flat. He ran down the stairs and got into his car without looking back.

Since returning to work Reg had felt isolated. He was aware of the looks he got from staff. The *no smoke without fire* expressions on people's faces. He'd decided that keeping himself to himself was the best solution. But he missed the banter with those at the store. Now with his shift over he couldn't face going home to his flat so he decided to call on Margaret. She at least would welcome him especially after losing her mother so suddenly. He caught the number 23 outside the store and sat upstairs at the back. The bus wound its way through the narrow streets of the town and then accelerated up the steep hill, reaching the park. He looked out over the bowling green and pavilion. This was where all his problems started and according to D.I. Nicholls, ended. He knew he couldn't go there again. If he did he could well be arrested, but it was such a big part of his life. One he missed so much. The bus pulled out into the traffic and he got off at the end of Peter Street and walked to the semi-detached house and rang the bell.

Margaret opened the door. She looked tired and there were bags under her eyes. 'Hello Reg,' she said, 'what are you doing here?'

'I heard the news about your mother. I'm so sorry. Is there anything you need?'

She stood to one side and signalled for him to enter. He took off his hat and placed it under his arm and stepped into the hallway. He handed her a bunch of flowers. 'I thought these might cheer you up.'

She looked at the flowers and started to cry. 'Oh, Reg. It's been awful. I just didn't expect it.'

He put his arm around her and gave her a squeeze. 'You go in the living room and sit down. I'll make you a cuppa.'

'Thanks,' she said, wiping her eyes.

In the kitchen he put the kettle on and made a pot of tea. In the pantry he found a packet of biscuits and put them on a plate. He carried a tray into the living room where Margaret was dabbing her eyes. She looked up at him. 'I'm sorry about breaking down, Reg. It was the present that did it.'

'Well I can always take the flowers home,' he said, grinning as he poured the tea.

'No, they're lovely. I'm not used to such kindness.'

He stirred his tea and took a sip. 'So what was the cause of death?'

'Not sure yet. They are doing a post mortem today.'

'Most probably her heart gave out,' he said. 'What age was she?'

'Seventy four.'

'No age at all really. But I suppose she had a lot of problems.'

'Yes. She was never in the best of health.'

She moved back in her seat. 'So how are things at work? I hope the canteen is running smoothly.'

'Yeah, no problem. Betty and Elaine are running the show. But I'll tell you one thing.'

‘What’s that?’

‘We’re all missing your cottage pie.’

‘Oh get on with you. It’s nothing special.’

‘No one cooks like you.’

She laughed and helped herself to a biscuit and dipping it in her tea.

‘But what about you? How are things since you went back to work?’

‘Not so good. Mud sticks I’m afraid. People now see me as a pervert.’

‘But you’re not. Everyone knows that girl turned up. I think the police had a damn nerve keeping you all that time for questioning. I hope you got an apology.’

‘You must be joking. I’ve been warned off going to the park. They made it clear that I was disliked.’

‘So what happens now?’

‘Nothing. As far as I’m concerned I’m totally innocent.’

Celia stayed in the window for a long time after William had driven off in his Jaguar. The sight of the car disappearing down the road filled her with sadness. He had made it clear that he had no intention of returning. Her new found hopes of a shared life and marriage were swept away in those few minutes. Now all she felt was rage. She eventually moved from the window and screamed at the top of her voice. ‘Bastard! You absolute bastard. Don’t think you can dump me like this.’ Her voice broke into a high pitched shriek as she picked up a crystal vase from the table and threw it across the room watching the glass explode into hundreds of pieces on the floor. She sank onto her knees on the

carpet and wept, staying in the same position until it started to go dark. She thought of her future without William. Then got up from the floor, poured a large whiskey, and started to plot her revenge. She picked up the phone and dialled a number.

‘Moulton Chronicle,’ said the voice.

‘Good evening. I may have some very interesting news for you. It concerns Carrington’s store.’

At 9 am the following morning John Gray entered the store and took the escalator up to William’s office. He didn’t bother to knock and went straight in. ‘Morning, Patterson,’ he said, placing his briefcase on the desk and taking out a file.

William was on the phone and looked up in surprise. ‘I’ll ring you back,’ he said, replacing the receiver. He got out of his seat and shook hands. ‘I didn’t expect to see you today.’

Gray brought a chair up to the desk and put on his glasses. ‘This,’ he said, pointing to the file, ‘is confidential. I don’t want anything repeated from our talk this morning. It is highly confidential.’

‘Of course. That goes without saying.’

‘Good,’ he said, ‘because what I’m going to tell you might well change your future as well as my own.’

‘I see.’

‘The decision has been made. The takeover is going through.’

‘So when was the vote cast?’

‘Yesterday. It was very close. The upshot is that we will soon be taken over by Rightways. And of course it will mean changes.’

‘So what’s happening?’

‘Promotion for some, sideways moves for others. And for many’

‘Redundancy?’

‘We prefer to call it letting people go. It will be done through voluntary early retirement. So it’s not all bad news.’ He put the file on one side, then moved back in his chair. ‘The thing is, Patterson, some people lose out from this sort of situation.’

William felt a feeling of dread running through his whole system. Is this, he thought, my swan song? Is it all over? He looked up. ‘So what are you telling me?’

Gray put his finger to his nose in a tapping movement. ‘At this precise moment I have no idea. But what I can tell you is I’m moving to Head Office. I’ll be the new director of retail.’ He sat forward in his chair and met William’s eyes. ‘It’s only the cream that survive. Don’t forget that.’ He quickly put the file away in his brief case and got up to leave.

Celia had remained in her flat for several days. She’d not bothered to shower or wash her hair and the track suit she’d been wearing was now taking on a creased and grubby appearance. She sat on the sofa staring at the television that was screening an old black and white film and like other days she had lost the thread as her mind kept returning to William. She was, she knew, getting through the days by filling them with trivia. She had no urge to go out. The thought of

having to get washed and ready was too much in her present emotional turmoil. It was only a short time, she thought, since she'd had the most wonderful weekend with William at the country hotel, taking long walks, wining and dining, and experiencing a closeness she had not had for a long time. Now, in her rejection, she felt very alone. She knew there would be no wedding, no chance to be Mrs Patterson. She could not bear the thought of going back to work and having to type letters and reports for bad tempered bosses. Gone was her rise in status to company wife. Damn and blast Helen.

She got up to put on the kettle. She didn't particularly want a drink but making tea was something that occupied her, if only for a few minutes, and took her mind off William. She was just switching on the kettle when she heard the letterbox slam. She went to the hall and looked at the local paper on the mat. A sense of excitement filled her as she picked it up. There, on the front page, was the headline she wanted to see.

Rumours of Carrington's takeover

There are rumours that Carrington's department store, is in the process of being taken over by the American Company Rightways. Carrington's has been trading in the city centre for over thirty years and has a reputation for quality goods. The store, when contacted by the paper, did not comment as the manager, William Patterson, was away at the time.

She settled on one of the stools at the breakfast bar and re-read the article several times. A large smile crossed her face.

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Margaret sat in the living room window watching the traffic go by. The local school had just come out and several groups of boys passed with their shirts hanging over their trousers and carrying rucksacks on their backs. Following them was a group of girls wearing short black skirts. They were talking and laughing, occasionally pushing each other into the road. The house seemed very quiet and Margaret had found it hard to settle since Grace had died. She was just opening the newspaper when the phone rang. She crossed the room and picked it up.

‘Hello. Is that Margaret Haddock?’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s Dr. McGrath from the surgery.’

Margaret felt herself stiffen. She did not reply.

‘I’ve had the results of your mother’s post mortem.’

‘I see,’ she said. She started to feel dizzy and pulled a chair towards her and sat down.

‘Are you still there Miss Haddock?’

‘Yes.’

‘The cause of death was a heart attack.’

‘A heart attack?’

‘Yes. She had advanced atheroma. I’m afraid the arteries were clogged. She could have gone at any time.’

‘I see.’

‘So now you’ve got the results you can go ahead with the funeral arrangements.’

Margaret moved forward in the chair. ‘Could my mother have accidentally suffocated herself? You see I discovered a spare pillow near her head when I found her. I wondered if she’d rolled on to it and stopped breathing.’

‘Well people do often sleep with a pillow near to their face, sometimes for comfort and security. There was definitely no sign of suffocation so don’t worry on that score.’

‘Thank you for letting me know.’ She replaced the receiver and gave an enormous sigh of relief. The thoughts of the police knocking on the door and arresting her for murder had haunted her since finding her mother. Now, she thought, I can get on with the rest of my life.

William stared at the front page of the *Chronicle* and groaned loudly.

‘Trouble?’ said Helen.

‘It’s got in the paper about the proposed takeover.’

‘How?’

‘That’s what I’m wondering. I’ve only told you and Toby and’

‘And who?’ she said.

He coughed and cleared his throat to give himself time. ‘And Patrick.’

‘Well it certainly wasn’t me that said anything to the press,’ she sighed, as she turned over and went back to sleep.

He got up, dressed quickly, and left the house. In ten minutes he pulled up outside Celia's flat. He used his spare key to get in and found her in bed. She sat up as she saw him.

‘William. What’s wrong?’

‘As if you didn’t know.’

‘Whatever do you mean,’ she said, getting out of bed and slipping on her mules. She was wearing the white nightdress he liked and he could see her breasts through the thin material.

He held out the paper in front of him. ‘This is what I mean. Have you been speaking to the press? Do you realise how serious this is as far as shares are concerned? I told you about the takeover in the strictest confidence.’

She moved towards him and took the paper. She put on her glasses. He watched her reading the article. Then she turned to him. ‘William, how could you possibly think this could be me? I may have my faults but going behind someone’s back is not one of them.’

He stared at her. ‘Someone has opened their mouth.’

‘Well I can assure you it was not me. Good God I wouldn’t do this. People’s jobs and lives are at stake. I’d not be so cruel.’

He came towards her and took the paper. ‘I’m so sorry, Celia. I’ve only told a handful of people and I thought’

‘. . . . you thought it was me.’ She went to put on her dressing gown and he was surprised to find himself disappointed that she was covering herself up. He stepped forward and gave her a kiss on the cheek. ‘I’m so sorry. I really am.’

‘That’s alright,’ she said. ‘We are after all friends. Would you like to stay for a coffee?’

‘No I won’t stay. I’ve got a busy day ahead sorting this lot out.’

He let himself out of the flat and went down the stairs to his car. As he turned the ignition and moved away he felt ashamed of himself for bursting in and accusing her. She had, after all, been so kind to him. As he pulled onto the main road joining the heavy traffic he could not deny that he still found her damn attractive.

Reg was making himself a mug of tea when he heard the newspaper drop through the letterbox. He went and picked it up from the mat and put it on his chair to read later. Since the fire he no longer smoked in his office and now, if he wanted a cigarette, nipped out the back door of the stock room to light up. His trips to the park were now public knowledge, as were his photographs. At that moment he glanced out of the kitchen window and saw Eric setting off to town. ‘Bastard,’ he shouted, as he watched him disappearing down the street and out of sight. If it weren’t for that fucking arsehole I’d not have been under suspicion, he thought. Eric had kept a low profile since he’d been released. But Reg would get his own back on that little weasel. He already had a plan and it was just a case of picking the right moment.

He went and sat at the kitchen table with his mug of tea and picked up the paper. His heart missed several beats as he saw the headline about the rumours of Carrington’s takeover. He read the article and gasped. Nothing had been said to anyone. How many, he wondered, would lose their jobs. His security area might well be one to go. And where at his age would he find another job. Now he had something else to worry about. He looked through the

paper at other news. He spotted Grace Haddock's name in the obituary column. Loving mother of Margaret died suddenly but peacefully at home. 'Loving mother my arse,' he sighed. 'A bloody old trout if ever there was one.' He then turned the page and an advert caught his eye.

Art Classes

Why not try your hand at drawing or painting.
Models needed for twice weekly classes
at Moulton College at 7pm.
Ring Paula on 968435 for more information.

He cut out the advert and put it on one side. Nothing, he thought, would ever replace his photography and the trips to the park. But this might be a new direction and who knows where it could lead?

Margaret put on her black coat and waited for the hearse to arrive. Aunt Ethel and Uncle Fred sat in the two armchairs in the living room.

'Well,' said Fred, 'we've got a nice day for it anyway.'

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'Mother hated wet days.'

He put his pipe in his mouth and took out a leather pouch of tobacco which he started to undo.

Aunt Ethel slapped his hand. He put it back in his pocket.

Margaret moved from the window. 'I'll go to the toilet one last time. That is bound to make them arrive.' She made her way to the bathroom and looked at herself in the mirror. Today, despite having Aunt Ethel and Uncle Fred

for company, she felt very alone. As she made her way down the stairs she heard Aunt Ethel talking to Uncle Fred.

‘The sooner we get away from this funeral the more likely we are to find the Co-op open. I need a loaf, otherwise there’ll be no toast for breakfast. So don’t hang about talking to people like you normally do.’

Margaret returned to the living room and stood in the window. She saw the car arriving. ‘They’re here,’ she said, putting on her black gloves.

They followed her out and got into the car and drove slowly behind the hearse that was covered in flowers.

Fred stretched out his legs. ‘Well looks like Grace is having a good send off with all those flowers.’

‘She always liked roses,’ said Margaret.

Uncle Fred sat up in his seat. ‘I can’t see any roses in that lot. Look more like carnations to me.’

‘I’m going to plant a rose in mother’s memory,’ said Margaret.

‘That’s nice,’ replied Aunt Ethel, checking her watch to see the time and sighing.

They approached the crematorium and the funeral car pulled onto the long sweeping drive passing the tidy lawns and borders until eventually stopping outside the tall glass doors.

As they got out of the car and walked behind the hearse into the crematorium Margaret saw that several staff members were present. Reg was there and winked to reassure her; Donna from security was wearing a very smart black suit; Kirsty from cosmetics; Amy and Emma from the canteen; and Toby

and Patrick. She gave a general smile in their direction but avoided meeting Patrick's eyes.

After the short ceremony Margaret watched the curtain close taking the coffin out of sight. She felt a double sense of relief. Firstly knowing she had not murdered her mother. Secondly for Grace's death setting her free. She followed the undertakers to the courtyard outside and looked at the many wreaths that had been sent. There was one from William and Helen, one from the girls in the canteen, another from Toby, and one she was surprised to notice from Patrick. She stopped to look at the card. *In fond memory of Grace. So sorry. Kind regards, Patrick.* So sorry my arse, she thought. Sorry for what? Mother's death or for making a complete fool of me?

She got in the car with Uncle Fred and Aunt Ethel and set off home. As they approached the town centre Aunt Ethel looked at her watch and turned to Margaret. 'Would you mind if we got out here? You see we can get a number 49 all the way to our front door if we go now.'

Margaret told the driver to stop and they got out. Aunt Ethel stuck her head by the window and signalled for Margaret to open it. 'Good luck dear. We'll be in touch.'

Margaret closed the window and signalled to the driver to head home.

When she arrived at the house it was silent. She looked around the cluttered room with the commode, wheelchair, and elastic stockings on the radiator. Tomorrow she would have a clear out. But for tonight, she thought, going to the pantry and opening a bottle of claret, I'll spend the evening in another place.

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Reg entered the art class with great excitement. He sat in the front row and got out his pencils. Gradually the room filled up. There were mixed ages. A lady in her seventies sat next to him and introduced herself as Muriel. He nodded. But his eyes focussed on the young girl in the silk dressing gown that had just entered the room. The teacher, a small man with a wispy moustache, stood in front of the class and raised his hand. A sudden hush descended.

‘Good evening everyone. I’m Bob Graves. Tonight Gloria is going to pose for us. For those of you who have not done life drawing before please try and concentrate on the muscle tone for authenticity.

Reg smiled to himself. I’ll concentrate on her tits,’ he thought.

Gloria turned her back on the class and removed her dressing gown. Reg examined her slim bottom as she climbed onto the sofa, while Bob turned on the bars of the small electric fire.

Reg gasped as she turned round and spread her body across the pale brown sofa. Although she was slim she had ample breasts that bobbed as she got herself into a comfortable position. He then realised the rest of the class had started drawing. He wiped away the saliva that had started to run down his chin and picked up his pencil. He found it hard to contain his excitement. Once he was home he’d put his drawing on the bedroom wall as he fantasized about taking away her innocence. He knew he would sleep well after that.

Margaret was tidying the living room and moving out Grace’s items ready for the social services to collect. She looked round and realised how dowdy

everywhere looked. If I paint over the wallpaper, she thought, change the curtains and make covers for the suite it would look much brighter. She stopped to make a mug of coffee and settled on the sofa putting her feet on the leather stool. She was taking her first sip when the phone rang. She leaned over and picked it up.

‘Hello.’

‘Is that Miss Haddock?’

‘It is.’

‘Ah, good morning. My name is Harold Cooper from Cooper, James, and Jones.’

‘I’m not interested in buying anything,’ said Margaret.

‘I’m not selling anything. I represent a firm of solicitors. Your late mother lodged her will here. I’d like to speak to you. Is it possible for you to come into the office today? Say two o’clock?’

‘Yes, I suppose so. How do I find you?’

‘We’re on the High Street. Number 217 opposite the market entrance.’

At two o’clock Margaret entered the offices of Cooper, Cooper and Jones. She rang the bell at reception.

‘Yes,’ said the young girl coming from behind an office door.

‘I’m Margaret Haddock. I have an appointment with Harold Cooper.’

‘Ah yes. Follow me Miss Haddock. He is expecting you.’

She followed the young girl along the blue carpeted corridor until she stopped at a door and knocked.

‘Come in,’ said a deep voice.

‘This is Miss Haddock, sir.’

Harold Cooper, a stocky man came from behind his desk and held out his hand. ‘Nice to meet you. May I call you Margaret?’

‘Yes. That’s my name,’ she said, sinking into the comfortable black leather seat by the desk.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘tea or coffee?’

‘Coffee please. White with two sugars.’

He handed her a cup and offered a plate of biscuits. She studied the selection and took a chocolate cream.

He joined her at the desk and opened a file in front of him. ‘I don’t know if you know exactly why I’ve asked to see you?’

‘Not really. You said something about a will on the phone.’

‘Yes. That’s right. Your mother lodged her will here many years ago. I’m pleased to say you are the main beneficiary.’

‘The main what?’ she asked, dunking the biscuit in her drink.

‘Beneficiary. It means you inherit your mother’s estate.’

Margaret placed her cup on the desk. ‘But my mother didn’t have much money. Only a couple of hundred pounds in the Post Office.’

Harold Cooper sat back in his chair, his open jacket revealing red braces that looked as if they were holding in his bulging paunch. ‘On the contrary, your mother had been very frugal over the years. She amassed a goodly sum in bonds and shares, many of which she inherited from your late father.’

‘But that was years ago.’

‘Exactly. And the savings have accumulated interest over a long period.’

Margaret helped herself to another chocolate biscuit and picked up her cup of coffee. 'So how much exactly are we talking about?'

He opened the file and ran his finger down an A4 sheet. 'Well, taking everything into account, the savings as at today amount to £150,000.'

She spilt her coffee on her coat and quickly put the cup down. 'Bugger me! Are you serious?'

'Yes, quite serious. Plus of course you have to add on the value of the house. He passed her a tissue to wipe her coat.

'I had absolutely no idea,' she said.

'So, Margaret. What I'd like to do is get you to come in later in the week and meet our financial advisor who will help you decide how best to deal with your inheritance. I'll give you a ring later on today to make a suitable time.' He got up and shook hands. 'My receptionist will see you out.'

She stepped out onto the High Street in a daze. How come, she thought, I spent all those years scrimping and saving when mother had this huge amount of money just sitting in the bank? She stopped at the Grosvenor Tea Rooms and ordered herself a pot of tea and a large cream cake. She sat in the window watching shoppers passing by. This, she thought, is the beginning of a new life.

Celia got dressed in jeans, anorak, and woolly hat and headed into town. She mingled easily with the afternoon shoppers who crowded the pavements. The day was chilly and as raindrops started to fall several umbrellas opened.

As she turned the corner to High Street the familiar stone building of Carrington's came into sight. She felt her heart thumping in her chest and as she

got closer she pulled down her woolly hat further over her ears and tucked in her blonde hair.

The store was crowded as she entered through the revolving glass doors. She joined the shoppers and got in the lift to take her to the fourth floor bridal department. This section, housed in the first Carrington's building before later extensions took place, retained the charm of an earlier age. The high arched ceilings of stained glass let in plenty of light. The walls were decorated in pastel shades of blue, and a central staircase led to the racks of gowns on display.

The department was bustling with young brides to be who were searching for a dress for that special day. Celia busied herself looking through some of the gowns. A young girl came out of one of the changing rooms in a very full ivory gown. Her mother stepped forward beaming with delight. 'Oh, my dear. You look absolutely wonderful.'

The girl pulled a face. 'It's crap. Makes me look like a bloody meringue.'

Her mother felt the material. 'Nonsense, darling. This is a beautiful design. It so suits you.'

The girl swirled round and looked at her reflection in the full length mirror. 'No. Not having it. I'll look ridiculous.'

An assistant approached. 'Can I be of any help?' she said. 'Perhaps if you try on another dress we can compare styles.'

Celia moved behind them. This was, she thought, the ideal distraction she needed. She walked along the row of gowns. When she reached the furthest point she glanced back and saw the three women still deep in conversation. The

assistant was holding the train of the dress to show the clients some special hand stitching.

Celia took a pen knife from her pocket and slit open the plastic cover of one of the dresses. Then with great precision she slashed the bodice of the silk gown, watching the blade slice through the embroidered material. She moved on to the next dress and ran the blade of the knife through the full skirt. She did the same with the next two and smiled as she thought of the thousands of pounds of damage to the stock.

She looked up to see the women still chattering. The young girl's face was pink and showed the frustration she felt as she retreated to the changing room once more to try on a different design. Celia made her way unnoticed to the lift. As she travelled down through the floors she glanced at herself in the mirror. The anorak and woolly hat hid her normal elegant look. For a short time she had become someone else – and it felt good. Customers got in and out of the lift holding the familiar bags with the green and white Carrington's logo. As the lift reached the ground floor she stepped out and made her way through the crowds and onto the street. She was just another face in the crowd. But no one could know the buzz she was now feeling.

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Margaret climbed the narrow stairs to Patrick's attic flat and rang the bell. She heard movement inside and waited. Eventually he opened the door slightly and peered out.

'What the hell do you want?'

'You called in sick. Again.'

'So?'

'Aren't you going to ask me in?'

He reluctantly opened the door. 'Welcome to my humble abode.'

Her eyes glanced round the tiny lounge and kitchen area. 'No room to swing a cat in here.'

'I haven't got any cats.'

'And those stairs are lethal. You want to tell the landlord about that threadbare carpet. Someone could go arse over tit on that.'

'I'm not in a position right now to complain about anything.'

'Ah, I see. How much do you owe him?'

His eyes moved to the floor. 'Three months' rent. He's given me a week to come up with the cash.'

'Or you're out on the street?'

'That's about it.'

'Best put the kettle on and we'll have a cuppa.'

He got up and lit the gas and took two mugs out of the cupboard.'

'Don't suppose you've got any biscuits?'

'You suppose right.'

She watched him making the tea in his track suit bottoms and faded T-shirt. He took a carton of milk from the fridge and sniffed it before pouring it into the mugs. He looked a different person to the one she normally saw so well dressed in work. She suddenly felt sorry for this sad figure.

He bought two mugs to the table. 'There you go.'

'Thanks.' She took a sip.

'So? What are you actually doing here?' he said.

'Well I'm not here for a shag.'

He averted his eyes. 'Margaret, about that night'

She laughed. 'Look we were consenting adults. Both pissed. And that's in the past now.'

'So why are you here then?'

'I've given my notice in at the store. I'm going travelling. I've put in enough years at that place, serving up pie and chips. Now someone else can wait on me for a change.'

'Serving you pie and chips?'

'Exactly.'

'So when are you actually going?'

'Soon. I've just got to sort a few things out first.'

He drained the contents of his cup and moved to the sink.

'I presume,' she said, 'you are still putting money on the horses?'

'Yes.'

She took her mug to the sink and put her arm on his. 'Oh Patrick, will you never learn?'

Tears filled his eyes. 'I'm in deep shit, Margaret. I'll soon have nowhere to live. And if I keep taking more time off work I'll get sacked.'

She put her arm around him. 'I think we can do a deal, Patrick.'

'What sort of deal?'

'I'll pay off your gambling debts as long as you agree to treatment to stop your addiction.'

'Oh, Margaret. How can I ever thank you?'

'By promising to take treatment. And stop gambling for good.'

'I promise.'

'I think you know this is your last chance.'

William had felt a shiver down his spine after John Gray's announcement of an early morning visit to address the staff. He waited nervously in his office. His displacement activity of attempting paperwork was fruitless. Would he, he wondered, still have a job at the end of the day? Or might he be axed in the takeover? He tried to put the thought to the back of his mind. However, he knew only too well, there would be casualties. He moved to the window and looked out at the traffic moving slowly along the High Street. The sound of the door opening startled him. He turned round to see John Gray entering.

'Morning Patterson,' he said, pulling up a chair and opening his brief case. He took out several files. 'Let's get cracking shall we. I've got a busy day ahead of me.'

'Yes of course,' said William, returning to his chair.

‘I won’t beat about the bush. This has been a difficult week for Head Office. An enormous amount of work has landed at our feet with the takeover. But, I’m pleased to say there are only a few early retirements and the majority of the staff will keep their jobs.’

William felt a sigh of relief wash over him. ‘Well that’s good news at least.’

‘Quite. But people will have to get used to a very different set up. Rightways are not Carrington’s and that must be taken into account by staff. The transition for many will not be easy. But it’s up to them how they deal with it. That’s if they want to continue in employment.’

‘Yes, but don’t forget Carrington’s goes back a long way. It’s been here in the city centre for as long as I remember.’

‘But remember the retail game has changed. Customers will still come. They may be a different type but as long as the tills keep ringing then that’s all that matters.’

‘I see,’ said William, his thoughts momentarily lingering on the Carrington’s green and white logo on the notepaper on his desk.

‘So you understand the situation then?’

‘Yes,’ he replied, leaning back in his chair. It seems, he thought, I’ve passed the first hurdle. I have to let go of my loyalty to Carrington’s and look to the future if I am to survive.

John Gray glanced at the clock. ‘Right, Patterson. Where do you see yourself in all this transition?’

Here it comes, he thought, keep cool and see what is offered. He took hold of the desk and pulled his chair forward and met Gray's gaze. 'Well, I've enjoyed managing this store for many years. I'm open to offers.'

'Good,' said Gray. 'As you know I'm taking up a directorship. After discussing it yesterday with Head Office I'd like to offer you my job as Area Manager. You'll be in charge of nineteen stores in the North West. Of course you'll have to move house as you'll be based in Lancaster.'

'Not a problem,' said William.

'The offer is on the table. Now of course you'll need to think about it and discuss it with Helen. Let me know in a couple of days what your decision is.'

'Of course. But I can tell you now I'm very interested.'

Gray looked at the clock again. 'I'd better make the announcement to the staff. Shall we go up to the canteen?'

William followed him up the stairs to the canteen. There was a buzz of chatter from the assembled staff. Some sat at tables, others were standing in small groups. A hush descended as the two men entered.

'Good morning,' said Gray, his voice booming throughout the large room. 'As you are all aware there have been rumours for a while about a takeover of Carrington's by Rightways. I've called this meeting to announce that the takeover is going ahead.'

Whispers could be heard from the crowd. Donna caught Kirsty's serious expression and raised an eyebrow.

'Rightways are an American company and very different to Carrington's. Head Office have been in talks with them for some months and I can assure you

they are a very fine firm to work for. The good news is that the majority of you will not lose your jobs.'

Sighs of relief were heard.

'If I can have your attention,' he said, his voice becoming more authoritative, 'I have to add that we will be offering voluntary retirement to several members of staff. A personnel officer will be calling shortly and all of you will be interviewed to try and place you in the most suitable positions once the takeover has taken place. In this period I ask for your patience and understanding. Remember that you'll be joining a young competitive company and they expect no less than one hundred percent from you. I wish you all the best of luck in this new venture. Now, unfortunately I have to get a train to London in thirty minutes. If you have any questions please address them to Mr Patterson.'

William was immediately surrounded by staff. 'One at a time,' he said. 'I'll do my best to answer everyone in turn.' But as he was listening to the questions his mind was on his own good news. It had come as a complete surprise to be offered the area manager's job. He already felt excited at the prospect. The move to Lancaster would be a new start. He couldn't wait to get home and tell Helen the good news.

Donna was taking a quick break when she was called urgently to the bridal department. She made her way up the blue carpeted aisle where Ruth was waiting. Her face was ashen.

'What on earth is the matter? You look as if you've seen a ghost,' said Donna.

‘You are not going to believe this. Come with me.’

She followed her to the far end of the line of wedding gowns. Ruth lifted up the covers to reveal the cuts in the dresses.

‘Bloody hell,’ said Donna, as she took the shredded skirt in her hands and examined it closely.

Ruth wiped away a tear. ‘They are completely ruined. All four were handmade.’

‘Did you see anything suspicious? Someone hanging around this area?’

‘No. Nothing. We’ve been busy today and it really is difficult to keep an eye on every single person.’

‘Get me the CCTV tapes. I’ll see if there are any clues on that.’

Back in her office Donna played the tapes. She sighed as she watched customers coming and going. Young girls were trying on different dresses. Then suddenly she spotted the figure in the anorak and woolly hat. The slight framed person was examining the gowns. After a few minutes she moved towards the far end and after looking over her shoulder took some sort of instrument from her pocket. Donna gasped as she watched the person attack the gowns before replacing the plastic covers.

The picture was not particularly clear and the woolly hat was pulled down to disguise a lot of the offender’s features. Fat chance, she thought, of catching this one.

As she replayed the tape she turned to see William standing in the doorway.

‘Spot of bother I hear.’

‘Yes. This is one crafty lady. Just watch this.’

She played the tape to the end where the figure made her way to the lift.

‘Hold it there,’ said William.

Donna pressed the pause button.

‘I know who that is. She’s always complaining and returning items to the store. Her name is Celia Langridge. Call the police.’

Helen spotted Verity at a corner table in Oscar’s wine bar and went over and gave her a kiss on the cheek. ‘It’s lovely to see you. Now lunch is on me as a big thank you for all your help when I was taken ill. Honestly if it hadn’t been for you I think I would have now been six feet under.’

‘Anyone would have done the same.’

‘But, things couldn’t have been worse with William being away on that course and not contactable all weekend.’ She attracted the attention of the waiter. ‘Can we have a bottle of Claret please?’

Helen looked round the wine bar. It was fairly quiet today. A young couple on the next table were holding hands and whispering to each other.

‘So,’ said Verity. ‘What’s new?’ as the waiter uncorked the claret and put the bottle on the table.

Helen poured them both a glass, took a sip and sat back in her chair.

‘Things couldn’t be better. I’ve started my training with Bernard.’

She took another sip from her glass and looked again at the young couple on the next table. Their meal had arrived and he was offering her a piece of his

meat on a fork to try. She turned her attention back to Verity. ‘Any good gossip I’ve missed?’

‘Not really. But my friend Celia seems to be having a bad time.’

‘Celia?’

‘Celia Langridge. She was at the wedding. Remember?’

‘I didn’t go to the wedding, Verity. It was my first day at my new job.’

‘Oh yes I’d forgotten that. It must have been William that met her. They sat together at the reception and I seem to remember she showed him the garden. She’s quite an expert on plants.’

Helen picked up her cutlery and sliced a piece of lamb. ‘So, you say this Celia’s had a bad time?’

‘Yes poor woman. She went through a very acrimonious divorce a couple of years ago and lost a lot of confidence. Anyway it seems she met someone new and fell hopelessly in love.’

‘So what happened?’

‘I believe there was some sort of crisis at home and he returned to his wife. It’s such a shame because Celia would make an excellent partner. The type that would put the man’s career first.’

‘I did that for a long time, Verity.’

‘I know you did, Helen. Anyway how is William?’

‘He was busier than ever when I was away in London. I rang several times and didn’t get an answer.’

‘Well that’s William for you. He’s always been a workaholic. A leopard doesn’t change its spots you know.’

Helen took a sip of her wine and replaced the glass on the table. 'It's strange though because he does seem a changed man since I came back from London. He even said he didn't mind me taking the solicitor training with the firm.'

'Bloody hell! A real turn around there.'

'I know.'

'He's obviously thought about it all again, Helen. He's now putting you first.'

'That's not William's style,' said Helen. 'I've found it difficult to work out what has caused the changes in him 'but her voice tapered off. She took a sip of her wine and suddenly realized that the truth was staring her in the face. It was William who had been having the affair with this Celia Langridge. The evidence was now so obvious. The timing coincided with her London trip. The unanswered phone calls meant he was not at home but with her. There had been no course and that's why he was ridden with guilt when he came home to discover she was seriously ill in hospital.

Margaret made her way through the busy crowds at the airport. She looked up at the board. Flight BA 1045 to Tenerife. Go to check in desk 35. 'Over here, Patrick,' she called. 'If you take my suitcase to number 35 I can manage from there.'

He lifted the heavy bag. 'What the hell have you got in here?' he said. 'It weighs a ton.'

'Everything I could think of.'

‘God, anyone would think you were going for six months.’

‘I may well stay that long.’

‘So you haven’t bought a return ticket?’

‘No. I’ll see how it goes. Life is a new adventure for me.’

He put the case down on the floor when the queue stopped. An elderly gentleman at the counter was searching in every pocket for his passport.

She winked. ‘I do hope my suitcase isn’t too heavy for you. I’d hate to see you get a double hernia.’

‘So would I,’ he replied, noticing the passenger had at last found his passport in his trouser pocket. The crowd moved forward and Patrick lugged the suitcase along. ‘So what are you hoping to get out of this holiday?’

‘Sand, sea and sex.’

‘In that order?’

‘Yes. There’s bound to be plenty of young men there.’

‘I suppose there’s no point in telling you to be careful?’

‘No chance. After years of looking after mother I’m as free as a bird.’

They reached the desk and she handed over her passport.

Patrick’s face went rigid as he hoisted the heavy suitcase onto the conveyor belt. ‘There you go, Margaret,’ he said, taking out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his brow.

She laughed. ‘It’s so nice having you as my personal slave. And of course I’ll be thinking of you working hard at Rightways.’

‘I hope you’ll at least send me a postcard.’

She laughed. ‘If I remember,’ she said, putting her passport and boarding card in her handbag.

‘Take care of yourself.’ He took hold of her arm and gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

She smiled. Then threw her arms tightly around his neck and planted a long wet kiss on his lips. She laughed as he stepped back with a dazed expression. ‘That got you worried didn’t it?’

He watched her walking to the departure lounge. She stopped and turned. He raised his hand and waved.

‘Wish me luck, Patrick.’

‘All the best,’ he said.

She grinned. ‘Now piss off back to work or you’ll get in trouble.’

Reg returned home to find the word ‘pervert’ scrawled across his door again. ‘Bloody kids,’ he hissed from under his breath. It was bad enough facing all the prying eyes at the store. Those looks that said so much. Guilty. No smoke without fire. He wiped the door and then applied a fresh coat of green paint. The gloss finish shone in the bright sun.

Eric had kept a low profile lately. Just the thought of Eric made his jaw stiffen. That bastard thinks he’s got away with it. If it were not for him I’d never have been arrested, he thought. I’d be able to go to the park. Take photographs. Life would have stayed the same. But Eric has ruined all that.

He went inside and put the kettle on. It was just starting to boil when he saw Eric going out. He decided to forget about the tea, put on his coat and followed him from a distance. The stupid idiot, thought Reg, thinks he’s in the clear. He most probably assumes that I’ve not been able to work out that he was

the one that shopped me. He thinks he's safe. But I'll show the fucking swine what it feels like to be attacked by the public, the press, and the police. He deserves it for what he did.

Reg walked along the pavement and saw Eric enter the narrow footpath that led to town. There was no one about and the light was starting to fade. He started to gain on him. Thankfully Eric was hard of hearing and would not be aware of anyone behind him. Reg picked up a stone and put it inside his glove. Suddenly he was right behind him. Eric was leaning forward as he walked and pulling up the collar of his overcoat to protect himself against the cool air. Reg raised his hand and hit Eric across the back of the head with one swift blow. He went down and stayed down.

There was the sound of moaning coming from Eric as Reg turned and headed home. He quickened his pace, only stopping when he reached the main road to look both ways before he crossed. He stopped at the Crispy Cod and bought himself fish and chips for supper.

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Celia was waiting for the kettle to boil when she saw the police car pull up in the road below. It must be those youths opposite, she thought.

She poured her tea into a china cup and settled in front of the television to watch the news headlines. For the last couple of days she'd felt totally liberated. Free from the day to day thoughts of William.

The news headlines were just starting when there was a knock on the door. Through the frosted glass she could see the outlines of their uniforms. She opened the door.

'Mrs Langridge? Mrs Celia Langridge?'

'Yes.'

'I'm P C Wood and this is WPC Craven. May we come in?'

'Yes of course.' She led the way into the lounge. 'Please sit down. I presume this is about those dreadful youths riding their bikes up and down the pavements? If you want my opinion I blame the parents. And this is a respectable area.'

'Mrs Langridge, this is not about the cyclists,' said P C Wood.

'Oh I see. So how can I help you?'

'We want to talk to you about the damage caused to several expensive wedding gowns at Carrington's store.'

She felt her face redden. 'I have no idea what you are talking about. You have obviously mistaken me for someone else.'

'Do you deny you were in Carrington's store on Saturday?'

‘Er, no. I usually go in at the weekend,’ she replied. Her palms were starting to sweat.

WPC Craven got out her notebook. ‘We have evidence that you damaged gowns in the bridal department.’

Celia moved uncomfortably on the sofa. Her heart was beating furiously in her chest.

‘My dear girl what evidence can you possibly have? I would not do such a thing. I’ll have you know I’m a respectable member of society. I will have my solicitor onto you. How dare you come here and accuse me of such an act.’

WPC Craven looked again at her notebook.

‘The evidence we have is the store’s CCTV cameras. You are seen entering the bridal department and taking a sharp instrument to the gowns.’

Celia fell silent.

WPC Craven put the notebook in her breast pocket and stood up. ‘Mrs Langridge we’d like you to accompany us to the station.’

Celia put on her coat and gloves and went out to the police car. As they pulled away she looked back at the flat. The ivy clad building with its oak door was disappearing into the distance.

William tapped the steering wheel in tune to the music on the car radio as he drove home. It had been an unforgettable day. One that had started with great trepidation but ended on an unbelievable high. Being offered the position of Area Manager was the icing on the cake. Now all he wanted was to tell the whole story to Helen.

Already, in his mind, he was planning the challenge ahead. There would be the initial transition period where Carrington's stores would be adapted to the new American look. He could hardly wait to start and, with moving to Lancaster, there would be plenty to do on the home front. He couldn't wait to see Helen's face when he got in. He turned the car off the main road, drove up Church Close and parked outside the house.

He found Helen in the kitchen drinking a glass of red wine. He gave her a quick peck on the cheek and took off his overcoat and scarf throwing them over the back of a chair. 'Christ its cold out there,' he said, fetching himself a glass and pouring some wine from the bottle on the table. He lifted the glass and downed the contents in one. 'My God I needed that. I've had a hell of a day.' He sat at the table and refilled his glass. He looked across at Helen. 'We need to talk,' he said.

'Indeed we do,' she replied.

His face broke into a wide grin. 'I've got the most amazing news. The takeover is going through with Rightways. John Gray came this morning. He delivered an excellent speech to the staff. I never thought I'd say this but he was magnificent in the way he handled it, inspiring confidence in everyone, saying the only way was forward. Honestly, by the time he'd finished speaking he had everyone eating out of his hand.' He took another sip of wine and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. 'Of course everything had to be handled sensitively – a lot of the staff have been with Carrington's for years and, as John said, the transition to this American company will not be easy. There'll be such a lot of changes to adapt to. After all Carrington's is a very English business. It's worked in what I'd describe as a genteel way whereas Rightways is more

concerned with a quick turnover of stock and profits.’ He gulped down the rest of his wine and re-filled his glass. He stared at Helen across the table. ‘You’re very quiet,’

‘Am I?’ she replied, filling her own glass and taking a sip. ‘Bad day.’

‘Ah,’ he said. ‘Anyway I’ve left the big news until last. You’re never going to believe this.’

She shifted her weight on the chair into a more comfortable position.

‘Believe what?’

‘John is taking up a directorship and I’ve been offered his job. I’ll become Area Manager and be responsible for nineteen stores. How marvellous is that? It will mean more money. Of course I’ll be on the road a lot.’ He got up and took another bottle from the wine rack. As he removed the cork he looked across at Helen and grinned, ‘even better is the fact we’ll get a new house out of this deal. I’ll be based at Head Office so we’ll be moving to Lancaster.’

Helen’s knuckles turned white as she tightened her grip on the wine glass. Her stern expression took him by surprise.

‘What’s wrong?’ he said. ‘You’ve hardly said two words since I arrived home.’

She slammed her glass on the kitchen table spilling the contents across the pine surface. ‘If you want two words I’ll give you two very good words. Celia Langridge.’

William stood rigid. Eventually he put his hand to his forehead. ‘Oh Christ.’ She kept her eyes on his face. He gazed down at the floor. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘it meant nothing. It really didn’t.’

‘And presumably I meant nothing to you when you were screwing her?’

‘No of course not.’

‘SO WHY?’ she shouted, pushing her chair back from the table and getting up. ‘*Why* did you feel the need to be with her?’

He moved across to her and tried to take her hand but she pulled away. He sighed heavily. ‘I don’t know why. I was weak. I’m so sorry, Helen. I really am.’

She moved back to the table and sank heavily into a chair. ‘You’re pathetic. Do you know that? Bloody pathetic. You couldn’t stand the fact that I had taken a job. And you turned to the first woman who flattered you.’

His face was flushed as he gazed around him in the deadly silence that ensued. Eventually he spoke. ‘I’m so sorry. I love you, Helen. I really do.’

She got up from her chair. ‘Well you’ve a fine way of showing it.’

He moved towards her. ‘Look we need to talk. Please sit down.’

‘No,’ she said, moving to the kitchen door. ‘We’ll talk when I’m ready.’

He heard her steps on the stairs. He grabbed his overcoat and went out the front entrance slamming the door behind him.

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Donna woke early and ran her hand down the soft skin of Sophia's back.

'Mmm,' sighed Sophia, turning over to face her. 'What time is it?'

'Five thirty,' she said, pushing the quilt to one side and getting out of bed.

'Why so early? Surely you're not going into work?'

Donna leaned over and gently kissed Sophia's neck. 'I need to check the stock before the store opens. Remember I told you about the takeover.'

'Oh yes,' she sighed, before drifting back to sleep.

Donna looked down at her and smiled. She then showered and dressed and drove into work.

As she walked along the corridor to her office. A figure came up behind her and put their hands over her eyes.

'Friend or foe?' said Reg.

'Christ,' she said, 'you scared the shit out of me. How did you know I was here?'

'Saw you on one of my screens upstairs. Nothing gets past me, I can assure you.'

She looked him up and down dressed in his black suit and white peaked cap. 'Well I have to admit you look the part.'

'Authority,' he said. 'That's the answer.'

'The answer to what? I haven't asked you a question yet.'

'No,' he said, his face forming into a sly grin, 'but I know you were thinking how dashing I look in my uniform.'

Donna laughed. 'Do you know that thought had not even crossed my mind?'

'I find that hard to believe,' he said. 'Anyway in answer to your question.'

'This is a hypothetical question is it?'

'Whatever,' he said. 'But the answer to how I maintain a tight ship here is to create authority.'

'Oh I see. And there was me thinking it was all down to muscle and pumping iron.'

'That as well. I like to think I keep myself pretty fit.' He clenched his arm and pointed to his biceps.

She laughed. 'I'm sure you do.'

'And, being the gentleman I am, I'll escort you to the stock room.'

'So what have you been up to lately?' she asked, as they walked along the narrow corridor.

'Life drawing. I've joined an art class.'

'Really?' she said.

He winked. 'Yes. And I've found I'm very good at it.'

'I can imagine,' she said.

'And don't forget,' he added, with a sly grin, 'you can come up and see my etchings any day.'

'Now why would I want to do that?'

'A little bird tells me you are on your own again. A bit lonely I imagine.'

'As it happens, Reg, I've someone new in my life.' She saw his expression change from smugness to surprise.

‘Oh. That was quick. I thought at your age you might find it difficult.’

‘No, Reg. Some of us get out there where the action is. We don’t spend all day watching porn and flying solo.’

His face froze. ‘Fuck off,’ he said, as he went back to his office.

Margaret raised her hand to the passing waiter and ordered two more cocktails. Lying on a comfortable sun lounger at the side of the pool was pure bliss. She looked up at the sky through designer sun glasses. ‘This is the life isn’t it, Pablo?’

His dark tan and slim figure were accentuated by the white trunks he wore. He looked up from his book and smiled. ‘It certainly is.’

She lovingly stroked his leg. ‘Put some more sun cream on my back will you?’

‘Sure,’ he said, sitting up. She passed him the cream and he put some on his hands and applied it to her back in slow sliding movements rubbing it deeply into the loose folds of flesh. ‘You have a nice skin,’ he said. ‘Very soft.’

She giggled. ‘And don’t forget I’ve got a squishy bottom. My friend Patrick told me that.’

‘Ah yes, Patrick. You should not call him a friend. He was a very naughty man.’

‘And so are you, Pablo.’

‘No. Never.’

‘Yes. Always.’ She laughed.

‘So,’ he said, replacing the cap on the sun cream and his eyes following a young redhead walking by in a skimpy bikini, ‘where shall we go tonight?’

‘I’m tired of the Casino,’ sighed Margaret. ‘Let’s go into town for a meal.’

‘Can I choose?’

‘Of course you can,’ she said, settling down on her front allowing the sun to brown her back.

‘You are a wonderful lady, Magsy. You make me very happy.’

‘I know I do,’ she sighed, ‘and you’re a real sweetie. But I have to go home eventually.’

‘I shall miss you Magsy. I really will.’

‘Liar,’ she said. ‘For an out of work waiter you manage to charm your way into any situation.’

‘Oh, Magsy. Don’t say that. It is you I like. Not your money.’

‘Yeah, and I’m a roller blade champion! There are plenty more rich ladies like me around. You will never starve.’

She settled back on her sun lounger and watched the young man opposite who had just jumped into the water. He swam a couple of lengths and then got out of the water. Her eyes followed him as he went back to his lilo and re-applied sun cream. His tight skimpy swimming trunks left little to the imagination.

Helen had worked on the Hamilton case late the previous evening making sure everything was in order for the signing of the court papers this morning. Mrs

Hamilton, after fifteen years in an abusive marriage, had found the courage to leave taking her two young children with her into a hostel for battered wives. Mr Hamilton, a six foot three giant of a man, had a restraining order to keep away from his family. But he had recently broken the order and turned up at the hostel where he'd confronted the manager, knocked him to the ground, and insisted on seeing his children. He was now in prison.

Helen left the file on her desk when she went to the ladies. On the way back she put two coins in the coffee dispenser. Nothing happened. She gave it a kick and immediately the machine swung into action. She watched as the steaming coffee filled the plastic cup below.

When she got back to her office the Hamilton file was gone. She looked beneath the desk but there was no sign of it. The meeting with Mrs Hamilton and Bernard was only fifteen minutes away. Papers were to be signed and sent to the court. She looked in the cabinet in case one of the secretaries had put it there. Nothing was under H, or I or J.

She glanced at her watch. It was now only ten minutes to the meeting. She stepped out of the office and went to Katy's desk.

'Have you seen the Hamilton file?'

The girl looked up and took out her earphones.

'Sorry, what did you say Mrs Patterson?'

'I was asking if you have seen the Hamilton file. It has disappeared off my desk.'

'Perhaps Simon has got it.'

'Why would he have it?'

‘I don’t know. But I saw him coming out of your office with a file a couple of minutes ago.’

Helen turned on her heel and ran to his office. She walked straight in.

He looked up.

‘Okay, where is it?’

‘Where’s what?’ he said, putting down his pen.

‘The Hamilton file. It has gone missing. You were seen coming out of my office with a file.’

He smiled. ‘Oh you mean this file?’ he said, taking it from his drawer and putting it on the desk with a loud thud. ‘Just thought I’d keep myself up to date with what’s going on.’

Helen felt furious. She picked it up and checked the court forms were all present.

‘How dare you take a file from my office without asking? Mrs Hamilton is waiting to sign the papers right now.’

‘Oh dear,’ he said. ‘Have I made you look a fool as well as inefficient?’

She grabbed the desk and leaned over him.

‘I know you resent me joining the firm. But you really are acting like a spoilt child.’

As she got to the door he shouted after her.

‘Maybe this will teach you to lock your office door in future.’

As she walked along the corridor she met Bernard.

‘Ah there you are. I was wondering where you’d got to. Is everything alright?’

‘Yes fine. But can you recommend a good locksmith?’

Reg waited outside Toby's office which was today being used by the personnel man from Head Office. The door opened. 'Do come in and sit down, Mr Perkins.' Reg followed him and sat at the desk.

The young man offered his hand. 'I'm Tim Stonehouse from personnel.' He then looked at the file labelled Reginald George Perkins on his desk and glanced through it. He eventually looked up. 'Now then, Mr Perkins, I see you've been a security guard here at Carrington's for fifteen years.'

'That's right. I work the night shift and look after the store when the staff have left.'

'Yes,' he said. 'Important work.'

'Very important,' said Reg.

The personnel man closed the file and sat back in his seat. 'The thing is, Mr Perkins, Rightways have their own security department. And they will take over the running of the store.'

'Meaning,' asked Reg, his heart starting to pump quickly.

'Meaning we have no job for you. And in view of your age which is now ' he said, opening the file again.

'Fifty three,' snapped Reg.

'Right. Now as I was saying there will be no position for you in the Rightways store.'

Reg grasped the sides of his chair. 'So where does that leave me?'

'It's not all bad news, Mr Perkins. We are going to offer you early retirement.'

'But I don't want to retire,' shouted Reg. 'What would I do all day?'

‘I can assure you that many people would jump at the opportunity to retire with a lump sum and pension.’

‘How much is the lump sum?’ he asked.

The young personnel man took out a statement from his briefcase and slid it across the desk. ‘I think you’ll find this very generous, Mr Perkins.’

Reg put on his glasses and studied the statement. It *was* generous he had to admit. Another piece of paper was slid across the desk to him. ‘What’s this?’

‘It’s a list of vacancies from the local agency we use. And we will of course give you an excellent reference. See if you fancy anything.’

He looked at the list and ran his finger down the page. ‘No. No,’ he sighed. Then he stopped. ‘Now this might be good. They want a janitor at that complex of posh apartments opposite the park.’

‘Excellent. I’ll get onto the agency and arrange an interview. You never know, Mr Perkins, this could be the start of a whole new adventure.’

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At three o'clock in the morning Helen was wide awake and went down to the kitchen to make herself a drink. She was spooning ground coffee into the cafetiere when William appeared at the open doorway. She didn't say anything and carried on making her drink. He sat down at the kitchen table and looked at her. 'We have to talk, Helen. We can't go on day after day in this silence.'

'Fine,' she said. 'If I remember, you certainly had plenty to say about what *you* wanted.'

'I was just excited about the offer of the new job. Sorry if I hogged everything.'

She pushed the plunger down on the cafetiere and poured herself a cup of coffee. 'We definitely need to talk.'

'I agree,' he said. 'This move for instance will take a lot of organising.'

'I don't at this moment want to talk about you. I want to talk about me.'

'I see,' he said, getting a cup and helping himself to coffee.

She stirred her drink. 'You announced a few days ago the news about being offered the job of Area Manager.'

'Yes. And of course it will make such a difference.'

'*Shut up!*' she shouted. 'Just for once in your life listen to my thoughts.'

'Sorry,' he whispered, picking up his cup.

'As I was saying. You announced the news of being offered this new job.'

He went to speak but saw the expression on her face and stopped.

‘The thing is, William, you just assumed that I would go along with your plans. You didn’t stop to think for one moment that my own life is important. I’ve now got a job which means everything to me. I have my training at the college organised. I have a lot ahead of me.’

‘Ah, yes. Your job.’

‘And what’s that supposed to mean?’ she said, getting up and moving to the sink.

‘It means I don’t like you working.’

She raised her eyes to the ceiling. ‘Just for once can you be pleased for me.’

He was silent for a few moments. ‘I thought you’d jump at the chance of a new house and more money. It would be a challenge for us both.’

She stared at him. ‘A challenge for you. Not for me.’

‘But I’ll need you to support me. Do the usual company wife things. Entertain clients, accompany me to events. Honestly you’ll feel different about it all once we get settled in Lancaster.’

She threw her mug into the sink and turned to face him. ‘You just don’t get it, do you?’

‘Obviously not,’ he said.

She moved to the table and gripped it tightly. ‘Well let me spell it out for you. I’m not prepared to change my own plans to accommodate you. I’m not going to Lancaster. I’m staying here and continuing my training with the firm.’

‘So what are you saying?’ he replied, pushing his coffee away from him. ‘What exactly are you saying?’

She let go of the table and looked down at him. 'I'm saying that the marriage is over. I'll find a flat in town while details of the house are sorted out. I suggest you get yourself a solicitor.'

Reg was sitting reading the paper in his new office at the apartment complex. He opened the plastic container in front of him and took out a cheese sandwich. He smiled to himself smugly. As janitor he was his own boss. He had no one to answer to. He'd already got acquainted with some of the residents through doing odd jobs for them. And with cash in hand there were no awkward questions.

As part of the day to day running of the premises he would do several rounds of the apartments, ensuring all areas were secure, lifts were working, and everything was up to his high standard. Suddenly there was a knock and the door opened.

'Morning, Reg,' said Donna. 'Do me a favour will you? I think the washer's gone on one of our bathroom taps. Be a love and fix it.'

'Sure,' he said, noticing Sophia standing in the doorway. She wore a navy suit over a white blouse and looked very professional. She was, he thought, a real hot babe. He'd watched her several times getting her long legs into her sports car.

'I'll make sure it is fixed today. No worries.'

'Thanks. You're a star.'

At ten o'clock he went on the first of his rounds and took the pass key for apartment 24. When he got to the second floor he opened the door to the flat and slipped inside. The rooms were tastefully decorated in beige and brown. In the

bathroom he put his tool box on the floor and mended the broken washer. He then pushed open the door to the bedroom. He looked at the red walls and the black silk sheets on the king size bed. He imagined Donna and Sophia naked and making love.

He moved to the dressing table covered in pots of make-up and brushes and slid open the top drawer. He took out a white thong. He thought of Sophia wearing it and held it to his face, breathing in the soapy lavender smell. He reluctantly put it back in the drawer. The view from the window overlooked the park. Two elderly men were on the bowling green. One was bending down getting ready to throw while the other stood watching. Nowadays he didn't miss his daily visits.

He searched in his tool box, took off his shoes, and climbed on the bed. He reached up to the light and attached a small device. He smoothed the duvet with his hands before leaving the apartment. As he arrived back at his office he helped himself to another cheese sandwich.

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It had been six months since Helen had moved into her town flat. She had got into the habit of taking work home and spending a couple of hours on the cases in her charge. She was working her way through the Avril Somerton file, whose husband had left her with four children, when the doorbell rang. She looked through the spy hole and saw Gerry standing there. She opened the door.

‘Hello, Helen. Hope you don’t mind me calling round?’

She smiled. ‘Of course not. But what are you doing up in the north?’

‘Taking a few days break.’ He followed her into the lounge.

He looked round the room. ‘This is very nice. Really cosy.’

‘Small you mean?’

He laughed. ‘No. And size isn’t everything you know.’

‘So I’ve been told.’

He looked out of the French window. ‘Lovely area this. I envy you this view.’

She poured two glasses of wine and gestured for him to sit on the sofa.

‘But surely you’ve got good views from your apartment. Near Hyde Park aren’t you?’

‘That’s right. But London is very crowded and noisy. I often think it is a place for the young.’

‘So, would you ever consider moving north?’

He sipped his wine and put the glass back on the coaster. ‘Maybe when I retire in two years.’

She took a sip of her wine. ‘Anyone special in your life?’

‘No. Not really been anyone since my divorce. What about you?’

‘Same.’

He studied her face for a while. ‘I suppose, as nice as it is being independent it can get lonely. Can’t it?’

She sat back on the sofa. ‘Yes I know what you mean. It’s those times when you go to the theatre.’

‘Or on holiday,’ he added. ‘It would be nice to have someone to share it with.’

‘Yes, exactly.’

‘So,’ he said. ‘Have you any plans for tonight? I don’t know about you but I’m starving.’

‘Yes I’m starving too.’

‘In that case would you care to go out for dinner?’

‘I’d love to. But only on one condition.’

‘What’s that?’

‘We don’t end up doing the tango again.’

Reg cooked bacon and sausage on the stove and then added two eggs that splattered as soon as they hit the hot fat. He buttered two thick slices of bread and settled down at the kitchen table. He was just turning the tomato ketchup bottle upside down to get the last drops onto his plate when someone knocked at the door. ‘Just coming,’ he shouted. He opened the door and saw D I Nicholson standing on the step.

Reg adopted an aggressive stance. ‘What the hell do you want?’

‘Just a few words, if you don’t mind. Can I come in?’

‘I suppose I can’t stop you. The last time you called you left the place in a right old state. Couldn’t find a thing for days.’

‘We had a search warrant. That gave us the right to turn the place over.’

‘And what about my bloody rights? Taken down to the nick and questioned over and over for something I didn’t do. Call that legal?’

‘We were only doing our job, Mr Perkins.’

‘So what do you want this time? Another missing girl that you suspect I’ve abducted? I don’t go to the park these days.’

Reg took his plate from the cooker where grease had run down the sides and stained the enamel surface. He started to eat his meal.

The D.I. approached the table and towered over him. ‘Eric Vickers from next door has been in hospital since being attacked with an object on the lane that cuts between Lacey Road and Derwin Avenue. Know anything about it?’

Reg, chewing on a large sausage, started to choke. He coughed several times and went red in the face. He put down his fork. ‘Now why should I know anything about that?’

‘Well, it was Mr Vickers that phoned us anonymously to inform us of the pictures displayed on your bedroom wall.’

‘If he phoned you anonymously how did you know it was him?’

‘We traced the call.’

Reg pushed his plate away from him. ‘I had nothing to do with it. I am completely innocent. And just because you tried to frame me last time don’t think it will work again.’

‘A witness has come forward. Someone saw you follow Mr Vickers and hit him with an object on the back of the head.’

Reg stiffened. ‘So who was it?’

‘A resident. He was in his garden shed and recognised you from your picture in the newspaper.’

Reg fell silent.

‘I’d like you to accompany me to the station Mr Perkins. I have a car waiting outside.’

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Helen waited for Bernard in the lobby of the court building. The courts at Wington had become a familiar place. In the last twelve months she'd climbed the steps to the sandstone building many times. It was under the watchful eye of Bernard that she was learning her trade – compiling documents, attending meetings, and going to the local college.

In her briefcase she had the files for the Callender vs Callender case. It had been a long drawn out affair where neither of the couple could agree on terms. However today should, she thought, show some forward movement as Mr Callender had come up with a more generous deal. One that she felt his wife would find difficult to refuse.

She glanced at her watch. It was 9:15 and Bernard was late. Then as she looked up she saw his bulky figure emerging through the revolving doors. In the last year he'd gained a couple more stone.

He ran the last few yards, then took out his handkerchief to wipe the beads of sweat from his brow. 'Sorry! Dratted phone call just as I was leaving home. How are we for time?'

'We're fine. The first case has only just gone in.'

He quietly opened the door to court room 4 and peered in. 'Ah yes. It's Reg Perkins. This shouldn't take long. I hear he's pleaded guilty of two offences. Striking a neighbour with a stone and spying on female residents at the Green Gable apartments where he's janitor. He'll get a custodial sentence this time.' He stood to one side to let people pass as the court door opened. 'By the

way I'll see you around 7.30 tonight. Margery's concocting one of her duck recipes.'

Back at her flat Helen wrote up the report of the Callender vs Callender case. At long last, as she had hoped, the pair had finally agreed. In addition to receiving half the sale proceeds of their two properties Mrs Callender, now aged 67, would get a pension fund in her own right securing her future for the rest of her life. Helen put the report in her briefcase, then poured herself a glass of wine from the fridge and sat out on the balcony. From here she could see over the town. The tall chimneys which once dominated the town had gone. But many of the mill buildings, once housing thousands of workers spinning cotton, were deserted. The clatter of the machinery and dust filled air gone forever. Now they were apartments with open plan designs and inhabited by the young upwardly mobile.

She leaned back in her chair, put her feet on the railings, and sipped her drink. She had, she knew, come a long way in the last year. She'd worked hard, and the company had been good to her.

Her social life was also good. She'd made many friends. And the occasional dinners she had with Gerry were enjoyable. He had become a very close friend. He'd been there when she needed him. And only four hours on the motorway divided them. Near enough to get together for weekends, theatre trips or short breaks. But far enough away to lead independent lives. Both knew there was something special – but they'd agreed to take things slowly and see where they ended up.

Since her divorce she'd seen very little of William. The house in Church Close had been sold to a young family. Now as she stared across the town,

taking in the red tiled roofs and green lawns of the park beyond, she wondered if perhaps marriage had a shelf life. Did it follow the same route with the blending together of the ingredients, the reaching of its peak, followed by a steady decline of a sell by date.

But what I do know, she thought, is I couldn't go on pretending. I was able to convince other people I was happy. But I couldn't convince myself any longer.

Tonight the dinner at Bernard's house would be a pleasant affair. There would be Margery's excellent cooking, chance to meet friends, and the opportunity to network with new contacts.

She stepped inside and closed the balcony doors behind her. She had never felt happier.

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William woke to the sun shining through the blinds. He glanced across at the bedside clock. It was 6am. He got up and pulled back the drapes. The view from the Harringtons estate looked out across open countryside. In the distance he could see the golf course and the solid brick club house.

He had been in the Lancaster house for six months. It was within easy distance of head office and at the centre of the nineteen stores that now came under his control.

He had a busy day ahead so he got showered and then dressed in his navy pin stripe suit. He was just putting his brief case on the back seat of his company car when a woman opened a window in the house next door.

She shouted out. 'Don't forget the party tonight. 7pm sharp.'

He smiled and saluted. 'I'll be there.'

She shut the window. Even at this time in the morning, thought William, Lorna is up and dressed. She had made his move to the Harringtons estate as smooth as she could – providing cups of tea, wonderful dinners, seeing to workmen, and taking in deliveries. He was very impressed with her organisation and efficiency. The merry widow, as he thought of her, was one in a million.

He set out on the road and steered the Jaguar along the country lanes before entering the city centre and parking outside Rightways head office building. He made his way up in the lift to the boardroom where he had a breakfast meeting with John Gray. As he entered Gray was pouring himself a drink. He looked up.

'Coffee?'

‘Thank you,’ said William, taking a seat at the mahogany table where a selection of croissants, Danish pastries and fruit juices were set out.

Gray put the two cups of coffee on the table and sat down. ‘So,’ he said. ‘How are we doing on sales?’

William got a file from his briefcase and put some spreadsheets on the table. ‘Pretty good. Well up on last month. Particularly ladies fashion.’

Gray ran his fingers across the figures and nodded. ‘Excellent. But of course we can do better. And that’s up to you William. You need to get behind some of those managers in your area and make it clear. We want to increase our profits in the next six months.’

‘Of course. But this is not going to be easy without making drastic cuts. And by that I mean staff.’

‘My thoughts exactly,’ said Gray, as he helped himself to a croissant and smothered it with raspberry jam.

William moved his chair closer to the table. ‘We sifted out many of those that were surplus to requirements at the time of the takeover.’

‘Quite. It was a good opportunity to get rid of the under achievers. What this company needs is the cream. The graduates. The go getters. So I’ll leave it in your capable hands to sort out who goes and who stays.’

William put the spread sheets back in his briefcase. ‘Leave it with me and I’ll get a report in to you within the week.’

Gray got up to pour himself another cup of coffee. ‘So, how are things with you on the domestic front?’

‘Fine. I’ve settled into my new house on the Harringtons. Very convenient for business.’

Gray smirked. 'Pity about your divorce. Losing Helen like that.'

William fastened his briefcase and stood up. 'Yes, but I'm afraid these things happen.'

'But Helen was a jewel of a woman. Why did you let her go?'

William felt his jaw stiffen as he made his way to the door. 'Let's just say it was complicated and leave it at that.'

'Pity,' said Gray, his face turning serious. 'The company needs good wives. Someone there to keep our managers on the straight and narrow. Take the strain. Entertain clients.'

'Yes,' said William.

'The thing is I like to see all my area managers settled. That way I know everything will run smoothly. You get my gist I hope.'

'Yes,' said William. 'I do.'

He left the boardroom and made his way down in the lift. He gritted his teeth with rage. How dare that bloody bastard interfere with my life, he thought. And Gray of all people. A man who has been divorced twice himself.

His third call of the day was to his old store. As he entered through the revolving doors he stood out from the crowd with his navy pin striped suit. He ran his eyes over the ladies fashions on the ground floor. It was tidy and the aisles were clear. He made his way up the escalator passing beneath the buffalo logo hanging from the ceiling and went to his old office where Toby was on the phone. As soon as he saw William he finished the call and stood up.

'Morning, Mr Patterson. Nice to see you.'

‘Morning, Benson,’ said William. He put his briefcase on the desk and took out some papers. ‘Instructions from head office. Make sure you circulate them.’

‘Sure boss, er Mr Patterson.’

William took a seat. ‘So, business running smoothly?’

Toby leaned back in his chair. ‘Certainly can’t complain. The pile it high and sell it cheap philosophy certainly works. Sometimes difficult to keep up with the demand.’

‘That’s what I like to hear.’

‘It’s certainly different to the good old days with Carrington’s.’

William stiffened. ‘I surely don’t have to remind you that we now concentrate on making Rightways a success.’

Toby shifted uncomfortably in his seat. ‘No of course not. We’ve all had to move on.’

‘I’m very glad to hear it. Don’t forget Benson that now you are manager of this store you have to instil this attitude in your staff.’

They spent the next couple of hours inspecting each department. Donna now had a new security assistant. Kirsty, having found that Rightways did not stock designer cosmetics, had moved to a department store in the next town. There was a new cook in the staff canteen. And Patrick was successfully running the menswear section.

William and Toby descended on the escalator.

‘Everything looks fine Benson. Let’s have some lunch.’

‘I’ve booked a table at the Talbot,’ said Toby.

They left the store and walked along the road to the black and white pub and took a seat in the restaurant.

William looked at the menu. 'I'll have the sirloin. Rare.'

'I'll have the chicken curry. Mild.'

'So,' said William. 'Any girlfriend on the go?'

'No. Not at the moment.'

William grinned. 'You don't do so well with the ladies, do you Benson.'

'Oh I wouldn't say that. I've had my moments.'

'Well, you'd better get a move on. You don't want to miss the boat.'

The restaurant was starting to fill up quickly as the waiter brought their meals to the table.

William sliced into his steak. 'Nice piece of meat,' he said. He smirked when he noticed Toby was looking quite pink. 'How's your curry. Too hot for you?'

No, not at all,' replied Toby, picking up the jug of water and filling his glass.

William finished his meal. 'Coffee?'

'No thanks. I'll stick with the water.'

After a few moments Toby stood up. 'Well, better get back to the store.'

'Just a moment,' said William, gesturing for him to sit down. 'Head office are recommending we cut some staff.'

'Cut some staff. Why?'

'To increase profits. When the takeover went through we cut some staff but not enough.'

'Is my job safe?'

‘I really can’t say at this stage. I’ll know more next week when I’ve done the final figures.’

When William left the store he took a detour to Church Close. He pulled up outside number seven. The new owners had painted the front door blue and there were several hanging baskets and tubs on display. He sat and thought of all the good times at the house – the birth of Catherine, the parties, the garden Helen had created. He missed Helen. His affair with Celia had been madness. It had cost him his marriage. Celia was, he thought, lucky to escape with a six month suspended sentence on condition she sought the help of a psychiatrist.

Reluctantly he drove away and headed north. The road was busy with drivers returning home for the weekend. He put his foot down and overtook several cars in front of him.

Eventually he pulled off the main road and drove down the country lanes passing the Dalewood Golf course and turned into number 8 of the Harringtons estate. He let himself in. The hallway was quiet and he checked his mail. In the lounge he opened the drinks cabinet and poured himself a large gin and tonic.

After taking a shower and changing into slacks and a pale blue shirt he went and knocked on the door of number 6. Lorna opened the door. ‘William do come in,’ she said, offering her cheek to receive a kiss. ‘Everyone is here.’

He handed her a bottle of wine and followed her into the lounge. Several guests were seated with drinks.

Lorna took hold of his hand. ‘Look everybody, William’s arrived.’

He shook hands with the guests and Lorna brought him a gin and tonic.

George Kelgery, a large giant of a man, tapped the table with a spoon. A sudden silence filled the room. ‘Now then,’ said George, ‘I’d just like to say a few words about our host Lorna. Since moving onto the estate she has become a beacon of our community. She bravely picked herself up after being widowed and busied herself with charity work.’

‘Hear, hear,’ shouted a voice from the back of the room.

‘But more than that,’ continued George, ‘she has created the neighbourhood watch. I think I can safely say we will all now sleep soundly in our beds.’

A round of applause followed. Lorna made a little bobbing movement to show her appreciation.

‘Now, without further ado let’s sample another wonderful feast that she has prepared for us all tonight.’

Lorna opened the double doors to the dining room and everyone went through. William held back and watched her. She had so many good qualities. Admittedly she was not as attractive as Helen. And she was a couple of stone overweight. Perhaps sometime in the next few months he’d pop the question. After all she would, he thought, make an excellent company wife.

<The End>

COMPLEMENTARY DISCOURSES

CHAPTER 1

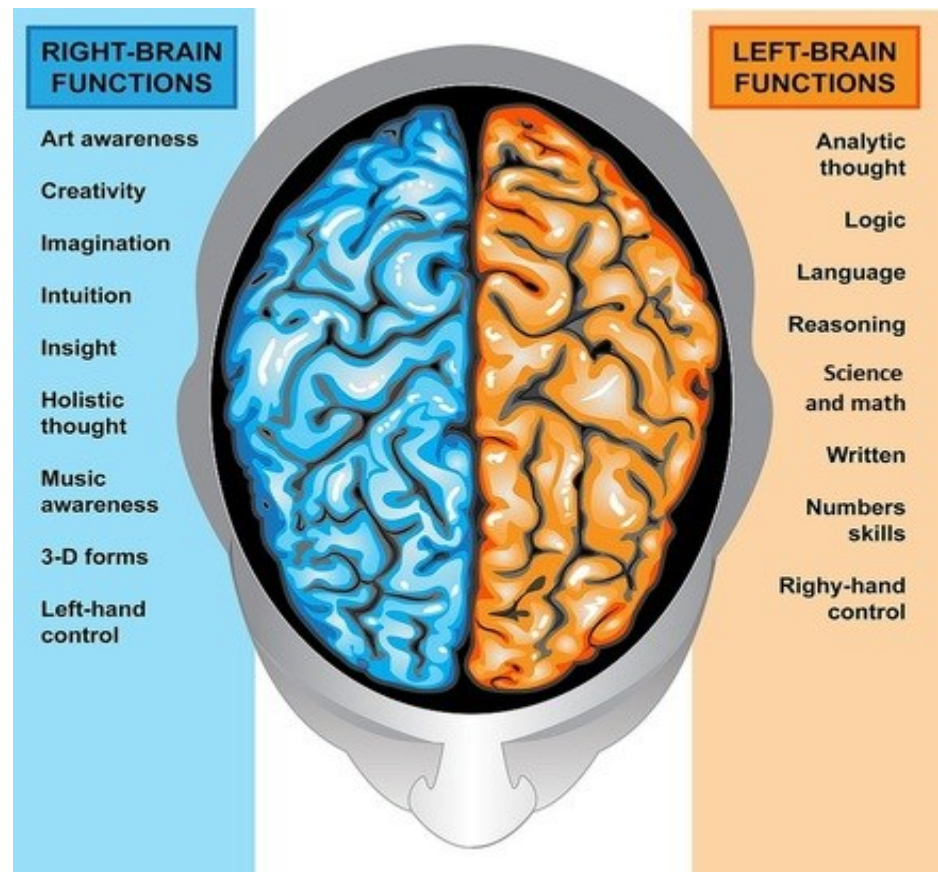
WRITING FICTION: CREATIVITY AND PLANNING

Authors of fiction face a multitude of challenges. Writing a novel is a massive project and can, in some cases, take years to complete. They write about experiences, either real or imagined, they have shaped through their individual imaginative and critical processes. Pre-planning is for some authors vital. Others may start writing and see where their creativity takes them. Methods of constructing fiction vary from author to author. Readers often assume an author forms an idea and starts to write – and indeed some use this method. I will investigate areas of creativity to compare and establish an understanding of the ways in which authors process their thoughts and create fiction and ask whether pre-planning stifles creativity.

The left/right brain functions

In terms of where creativity comes from, we can look to our physiological make up. The brain is constructed of two hemispheres. The left side is associated with verbal, logical and analytical thinking. It places events in sequential order. The right side functions in a non-verbal manner and excels in visual, spatial, perceptual and intuitive information. It processes information quickly, is non-linear and non-sequential. It flourishes when dealing with complexity, ambiguity and paradox – and has been associated with the realm of creativity. The following diagram shows the left and right brain functions.

Diagram showing the left and right brain functions¹



As can be seen from the diagram, the left side deals with logic such as numbers, language and reasoning. In contrast, the right side deals with creativity and imagination. This would suggest that the whole theory is a black and white situation. I think we need to look at the comparison in the grey areas that follow.

¹ <http://brainmadesimple.com/left-and-right-hemispheres.htm> (downloaded 13 September 2009)

Do we as writers of fiction have to train ourselves to use only the right side of the brain or do we need the left side also?

American writing expert Sharon Gibson (2013, p.1) argues that we work better if we turn off the left brain which deals with the critical and analytical side. We should let the creativity flow and not worry about such things as punctuation, spelling or grammar. Then we should switch to the critical mode of the left brain to do the re-writes and the editing. Maybe this assumes we are able to switch between the left and right side of the brain. Yet at the same time we need both to produce an end product, i.e. a completed novel.

In contrast, Linda Naiman, author and founder of *Creativity at Work* (2013, p51), believes creativity needs whole-brain thinking with right-brain for imagination, intuition and artistry and the left-brain for planning and logic. So one of the demands made on writers is to move back and forth between these two worlds.

Dr Alice Roberts (2010, p.304), Clinical Anatomist and Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University of Birmingham, adds fuel to the argument that it is not completely a black and white situation. She says that anatomically the nervous system shows left-right symmetry yet in terms of function, the story is not that simple. The brain's cerebrum is nearly completely divided by a deep front-to-back groove into two cerebral hemispheres: namely, left and right. They may look similar but each hemisphere dominates for certain mental functions. The two hemispheres communicate across a strap-like collection of nerve fibres called the corpus callosum.

She further states that information from the body has the ability and does swap sides on its way to the brain. Nerve signals travel within the bundles of

nerve fibres that are called tracts. These cross over from the left side of the body to the right side and vice versa. For example, sensory information from the body's left side ends up in the right hemisphere, and motor instructions sent from the left hemisphere control muscles on the right side of the body.

Science writer Rita Carter (2009, p.57), also argues that the left and right hemispheres do look very similar but that speech and language, analysis, stepwise reasoning, and some communicating actions are mainly on the left side in the majority of people and that the right hemisphere is more concerned with auditory, visual, and spatial awareness of our surroundings. However, she brings in an interesting point that MRI images have shown that brains are not as symmetrical in their left-right structure as was originally thought. The scanning computer can be programmed to exaggerate any subtle departures from an exact mirror image.

Carter (2009, p.168) also believes that creativity has the ability to reconfigure what you know. This may actually be in the light of new information, and come up with an original concept or idea. In order to be creative, a person must be critical, selective, and generally intelligent.

She also believes that in the creative process brains are bombarded with stimuli and the majority of these are ignored. This opening of the mind to new information starts the creative process. For this to happen, the brain needs to relax into idling. This is then characterised by slow alpha waves. In this idling state, stimuli that might otherwise be ignored enter into awareness and resonate with memories, and therefore generate ideas. Those individuals that are able to put their brains into idle on demand are more likely to open up their minds to new possibilities. However, the process will only work if the brain is pre-primed

with knowledge that can then be combined with the new material. This idea suggests that we are capable of controlling our brains to take in new information. An example of how writers use both left and right brain can be seen in Charlotte L. Doyle's study (1998, pp 29-37) when she interviewed five contemporary fiction writers, focusing on their experiences in creating fiction. She says writers progressed by alternating between a "writing realm" (in which the writer withdrew from everyday life with intentions to write, to plan actively for specific works, and to reflect on what had been written) and a "fiction world" (which was described in more passive terms, in which story elements came to the writer as narrative improvisation unfolded). I would describe Charlotte L. Doyle's "fiction world" as right brain writing due to the story elements being created, and the "writing realm" as left brain writing due to the editing and planning.

It must not be forgotten that there is, according to Rachel Reilly (2013, p11), 'a long held belief that people are either left brained or right brained.' But according to Sally Wadyka (2013, p2), a two year study by neuroscientists at the University of Utah have debunked this myth. In their study researchers analysed resting MRI brain scans of 1011 people between the ages of 7 and 29. It was found that in each of these people they looked at functional lateralisation of the brain and measured 7,000 brain regions to see which regions of the brain were more lateralised. They went on to study connections or all of the possible combinations of brain regions and then calculated the connections for each region that was left lateralised or right lateralised. They found no evidence that individuals use their left-brain network or right-brain network more often. This is, according to Rachel Reilly (2013, p1), a ground breaking result. It could change the way people think of the old theory of right-brain versus left-brain.

Another, similar view comes from Gazzaniga, Ivry and Mongun (1998, p.344) who say that ‘the left hemisphere was described as verbal and the right hemisphere as spatial and it might be assumed that the left hemisphere has sole province over all language functions. But when we look at stroke research where some areas of the brain have died, many tasks can be performed by either hemisphere – however they may differ in efficiency.’

My research has taught me that the brain is a very complicated and sophisticated organ and not yet totally understood by the experts in the field. Advances in MRI scanning have proved that the two hemispheres of the brain are not entirely symmetrical as previously thought. Added to this is the fact that patients who suffer brain injuries are often able to compensate for the areas damaged by trauma/stroke with the body re-connecting areas in the left and right sides to compensate – particularly in children where the brain is still developing. Right brain people do tend to work better in a creative environment. Furthermore, the education system has been criticised for right-brain students missing out in a left-brain dominant system.

Left Brain Teaching in the Education System

Left-brain teaching in the education system, according to Barbara Graham (2009, p10), is based on developing the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. In addition, we can see the arrangement of desks in rows, the order of subject matter, alphabetical listings and charts which dominate educational learning. She argues further that any right-brain tendencies among children are discouraged, and the minority who are right-brain dominant often have a difficult time

learning as seen in the experiences of exceptionally creative people like Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Bill Gates, who all struggled at school.

Author and psychologist, Tony Buzan (2002, pp 81-85) also found failings in the education system. He argues our traditional method of note taking has a major weakness because all around the world students are taught to take notes in blue or black ink or in pencil. He explains that a single colour to the brain is a mono tone of colour, and if something is a monotone, it is monotonous! He explains further that it does not matter whether we are making notes from left to right, Hebrew or Arabic making notes from right to left, or Chinese making notes vertically – because to the human brain it's all the same and goes to sleep. He stresses further that the lines of our traditional notes are like the bars of prison cells in which our creative thinking capability of our brains becomes incarcerated for life – so we need to free our brains with mind maps.

He himself struggled initially at school and severely criticises the linear note-taking we so often learn in education. Buzan (2002) states:

If you are 99.9% of the world's population, you will have been taught, as I was, to make notes that use words, lines, numbers, logic, and sequence. The only problem is that they are not a complete set. They represent your brain's "left-brain" skills and do not include any of your "right-brain" skills, which enable us to comprehend rhythm, colour, and space, and to daydream. (p.79)

As a result of this view he criticizes the use of the linear notes method that uses only the left brain functions and would like to see students benefiting from using

mind-mapping systems that display symbols, lines, and colours, that are more conducive to the connections that the brain makes.

In an interview with Jessica Shepherd in the *Guardian* newspaper (2009, p 1), Sir Ken Robinson, who chaired a government commissioned inquiry in 1998, found ‘a prescriptive education system was stifling the creativity of teachers and their pupils. He recognised all children start their school careers with sparkling imaginations, fertile minds, and a willingness to take risks with what they think. But most students never get to explore the full range of their abilities and interests.’ Robinson’s opinion is that children lose their natural curiosity and creativity when placed within the education system that continues to dominate with left-brain teaching.

The I Q test was another area in the educational system explored by American psychologist, J P Guilford, (2009, p.2). He believed that standard intelligence tests do not favour divergent thinking and suggested they work better for convergent thinkers. He showed that most creative people may score lower on a standard IQ test due to their approach to the problems which generate a larger number of possible solutions. After discovering this, he proposed the concept of divergent thinking after noticing creative people tend to exhibit this type of thinking more than others. He divided divergent thinking into four categories:

- **fluency** (the ability to produce a great number of ideas or problem solutions in a short period of time)
- **flexibility** (the ability to simultaneously propose a variety of approaches to a specific problem)
- **originality** (the ability to produce new, original ideas)

- **elaboration** (the ability to systematise and organise the details of an idea in a head and carry it out).

Many of his divergent thinking tests have been adapted for use in schools to measure the ability of gifted students and in placing them in special programmes.

According to Larry Vint (2005, p. 20), George Land, author and general systems scientist, tested 1,600 five-year-olds in 1968. Land was curious to see how highly creative their scores were. When these children reached the age of ten he tested them again, and again at the age of fifteen. He later tested 280,000 adults to see how highly creative they scored. The test results were as follows:

Age group tested	Number Tested	Year of Testing	Percent who scored in the 'highly creative' range
5 year olds	1,600 children	1968	98%
10 year olds	1,600 children	1978	30%
15 year olds	1,600 children	1983	12%
25+ year olds	280,000 adults	1985	2%

Study by George Land²

From this Land concluded that non-creative behaviour is learned – and from this and similar research he concluded that creativity is therefore not learned, but unlearned.

² What is creativity? Training, consultancy and resources to improve teaching and learning in Primary Schools. <http://www.thecreativeteacher.co.uk/index+2htm>

A solution to help in the teaching of right brained students in the education system could come from Sharyn Hardy Gallagher of the University of Massachusetts (2013, p.1) who says ‘the key is to switch to a variety of techniques that appeal to both areas of brain function to improve student learning. This for example could be done by enhancing lectures with graphical aids or using colour, music or other sensory experiences with a presentation or assignment that will touch both logical and creative brain processes.’

All primary schools have now introduced Creative Writing lessons. In many cases they have visiting writers. The introduction of any form of creative activity in schools has, as part of curriculum changes, placed more emphasis on pupils to use their imagination to explore possibilities. According to Mike Ferguson (2011, p.1) of Clyst Vale Community College, a visiting writer in schools provides variety. It creates change, which is good for pupils as it can keep them interested. He goes on to say that someone working outside the prescribed curriculum can offer stimulation with workshops providing ideas, structure and support. Plus, he also believes it introduces pupils to the notion of words as something fluid and malleable.

My research into the education system has taught me that pre-planned school curriculums with fixed timetables and subject matter have discouraged right brain creativity in children. This is confirmed by George Land’s research results that say creativity is ‘unlearned.’ Although primary schools have now introduced Creative Writing lessons secondary schools are still lagging behind. However, the education system has at least recognised the problem and some of the teaching methods introduced into primary schools are working very successfully and have encouraged children to think for themselves. And it is the

teachers who have also had to adapt to right-brain teaching. An example of this can be seen by Joan Williams (2003, p.14) who has produced an education support pack to help teachers. In it is the system of Kar2ouche, a flexible learning tool, focused on enhancing learning in a number of different subjects. It not only helps to develop skills but aids the development of thinking skills. Joan Williams believes that by using Kar2ouche students can learn to read for meaning, prioritise ideas, and sequence events. An example of a Kar2ouche activity is the use of storyboards which encourage students to show their understanding and ability to extract key information.

Another system is used by Literary co-ordinator Kate Parietti (2013, p.11) who uses video, drama and real life experiences to help students develop their creative writing skills. An example of this can be seen in an activity for children in Year 3 where an episode of *Doctor Who* was used to look at character emotion, and discuss the role of pace, movement, setting and character to help the children to structure their writing. The education system has started to make headway with the introduction of creative writing, the Kar2ouche method, and the use of videos to encourage children to think for themselves.

It can now be seen that great advances have been made in the education system to resolve the problem of left-brain teaching to avoid leaving right-brain students at a disadvantage. Barbara Graham argued that left-brain teaching methods such as having desks in rows, alphabetical listings and charts dominated a left-brain education system. Tony Buzan found that linear note taking had a major disadvantage. Sir Ken Robinson noted that children start their school days with great imaginations but this becomes stifled within the system. J P Guilford showed that most creative people scored lower on a standard IQ test and George

Land's survey testing children and adults between the ages of 5 and 25+ concluded that creativity is not learned, but unlearned. However, the education system has now introduced ways to help right-brain students. Primary schools now have Creative Writing lessons, some schools have a resident writer, and teachers have now had to adapt to right-brain teaching with such systems as Kar2ouche, and the use of videos to encourage children to think for themselves.

PART 2 - PLANNING

There are several methods of planning that can be used when writing a novel. One of these methods is brainstorming.

In the early stages of writing *Carrington's*, I brainstormed ideas by writing words randomly on paper. This allowed my brain to see the ideas in a non-linear way. The human brain works by making connections and this system can create the opportunity to produce more ideas. For example, the initial idea of a staff canteen produced the further creation of a customer rooftop restaurant that was to become a regular meeting place and where many scenes would be played out by Verity, Helen and Celia.

According to the writer Brad Isaac (2010, p.3) 'when brainstorming we should aim for a specific number and not stop until reaching the number. Do not judge the ideas, merely fill the page. This will give you ideas and directions. Brainstorming will add that extra push to your writing and take you in exciting directions.' However, not all writers agree with this method. Author Kerry Gans (2012) says:

I have never been one for brainstorming – just sitting down and pouring ideas and random thoughts and then looking back to see what interesting connections my brain made. It just doesn't

feel natural to me. It was never part of my writing process. (p.5)

While there are detractors like Kerry Gans, I found brainstorming a useful strategy and an example of my first brainstorming session for *Carrington's* is seen below:

Brainstorming

Manager's info
Shanty work
Cosmetics department
Staff canteen
Sales/preparations
Staff/problems
Store manager
stress
Home life
Returns dept
Store detective
Gambling debts
Secret lives

OSCAR'S
Company info/duties
Rooftop restaurant
Heads of departments
Manswear
Superior
Security guard
Law firm
Area manager
Head office
Customer complaints
Opening hours/Sunday opening

North of England
Department store
Silver/chrome fittings
Cook
Customers
store takeover

Example of brainstorming³

Many writers use the brainstorming method. In a postal interview with the author and journalist Joan Bakewell she stated:

I use all available techniques to write novels. The combination of techniques such as brainstorming, note keeping, and mind mapping underpin the accuracy of my writing. (p.461)

³ Initial brainstorming session for the novel *Carrington's* by D M Bradley

Through my research I have learnt that brainstorming fuses together the two areas of planning and creativity. The system is useful to put down initial words on a piece of paper and keep adding more words and see where this leads you. You are planning your first ideas for your novel and also creating new ideas as you go along. When writing *Carrington's*, I put words randomly on paper and did not stop and consider what each word meant or where it was taking me. The process was cathartic and further ideas emerged. At this stage no extended connections were made. I used the left hemisphere of the brain to produce a logical format and then later tapped into the right hemisphere to convey the ideas created into a story.

Brainstorming can also be beneficial in groups. I use the idea of multi brainstorming at the creative writing class I run. The advantage is the high amount of ideas generated. Participants bring along different knowledge and experiences. No ideas are criticised or rejected during the session and ideas can be refined at a later time. Often members of the class build their solutions on the ideas of others. This has a synergistic effect and allows even better ideas to surface.

An example of a recent multi brainstorming session at the class was when I gave out a title for a short story or novel entitled 'Murder at Miller's Court.' There were suggestions of settings such as a complex of retirement apartments, a courtroom, a yuppie quayside development, and a city centre high rise block of flats. The suggestions for the actual murder were poisoning, shooting, stabbing, a hit and run, and suffocation. The exercise involved the whole class and produced endless ideas that in no way were restricted. The random words created a large number of new ideas and proves that brainstorming is a good planning

system that leaves the brain free to create numerous words leading to new ideas. For *Carrington's* I found that single words on a sheet of paper set down the foundation of my novel. From this stage I would proceed to the method of mind-mapping that would start to make further connections.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is a system where words and phrases are put down on a sheet of paper. This method allows the making of connections through branches on which more and more ideas can be added. It can eventually produce a plan giving an overview of a large subject area by placing an enormous amount of information, such as a novel, on one page. A mind map is a highly effective way of getting information in and out of your brain – it is a creative and logical means of note-taking and note-making that literally “maps out” your ideas.’ An example can be seen below.

Example of a mind map⁴



4

https://www.google.com/search?q=mind+mapping&Cw&sqi=28ved=OCACQ_AUoAQ&biw=1093&bih=538. Downloaded 27 October 2009.

Mind maps are nothing new. According to the University of British Columbia, the first artefacts we know of that show something similar to mind maps date back into the 3rd century BC. Porphyry of Tyros, a Hellenistic philosopher and thinker of his time, is claimed to be using one of the earliest examples of mind maps to convey concepts, ideas and meaning. Ramon Llull, a Spanish philosopher of the 13th century, enlightened the Dark Ages with his creative visualizations. One of his diagrams is referred to as the “Tree of Knowledge.” Towards the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of a new era of science and art, Leonardo da Vinci made use of images and wrote in a non-linear fashion. By the 1950s Alan Collins and then in the 1960s M. Ross Quillian developed the concept of semantic networks as a way to understand and describe human learning and creativity and how they relate to the functions of the brain. It took another ten years before Tony Buzan, a British psychologist, popularised the idea of mind mapping through his books. Mind maps at the time were strongly related to pen and paper. However, with computers being more widespread, this eventually gave birth to software that brought the concept into the digital age. The benefits of bits and bytes enriched the technique and made it feasible for business use, primarily due to easy dissemination and export into other software like word processing and presentation software.

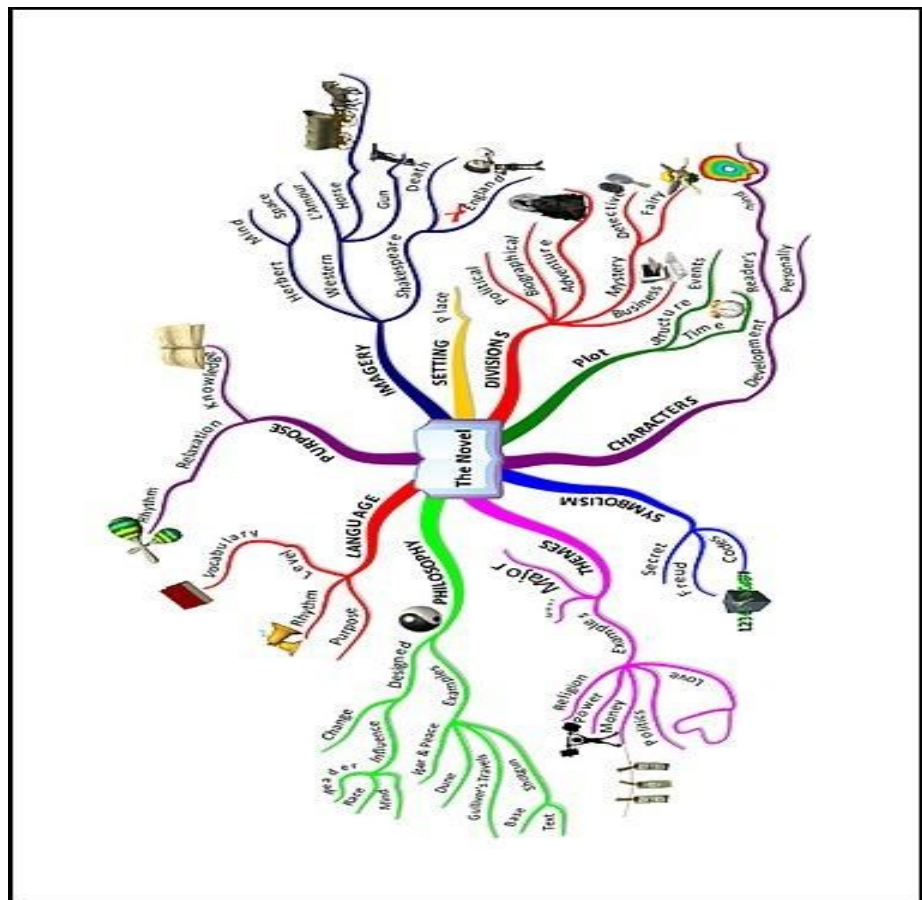
Author Linda Dessau (2006) believes mind mapping benefits writers and states:

Mind mapping encourages you to spread your ideas out, one-by-one, in a graphic way versus a linear way. Mind mapping helps you to be a more balanced thinker because it draws on your imagination and creative abilities as well as your organizational and analytic abilities. (p.1)

In respect of mind mapping and creative writing Dessau's view confirms that this method brings together creativity and planning.

Tony Buzan (2002, p.66) believes that novels are easy to mind map because they are made up of a number of major component parts, which allow us to condense an entire book into a single page. Such component parts include plot, characters, setting, language, images, themes, symbolism, philosophy and genre. The mind map stops the confusion about which character is which, and what, when and where the activity is taking place. Buzan offers a useful illustration of this below.

Example of a novel prepared on a mind map⁵



⁵ Buzan, T. (2003) *How to Mind Map*, London: Thorsons. p. 66

In Buzan's mind map of a novel we can see he uses different colours to emphasize areas - such as the colour purple for theme and navy blue for imagery. As he makes further connections such as major themes of money and politics he creates further twigs and drawings. This allows an author to see the bigger picture.

I found this mind map particularly helpful as it opened my mind to using different colours for each section. This separates the areas such as characters and setting and gives the brain not only an overview of the whole novel but also the areas that are within it.

When I interviewed author Dr Clare Dudman (2011, p. 404) she stated that mind maps are a vital aspect for her. Mind maps enable her to get new ideas and make connections that she would not otherwise have thought of. But, she describes the storyline as evolving because it unfolds as she is writing. It is a continuous process.

However, when interviewing crime writer Priscilla Masters (2011, p.439), she stated she uses an alternative function to mind maps. She relies on a calendar which she says stops her from moving incidents from February to March and March to April and completely losing the plot by making it snow in the middle of July. She describes her calendar as her stretcher and every time something happens she fills it in.

In a postal interview with Susan Hill, author of *The Woman in Black*, said she does not use mind maps and does virtually no planning except for the occasional use of a notebook (2011, p. 467). She describes herself as an intuitive writer and not a planner, but thinks it is possible to be creative within a planned framework. However, she did state that she vaguely maps out her characters

before starting her books. But on the other hand only ever writes one draft (2011, p.468). From this explanation it would appear that the only planning Susan Hill does is to keep a notebook on her. However, by vaguely mapping out her characters before starting to write, she does in fact plan to a certain extent.

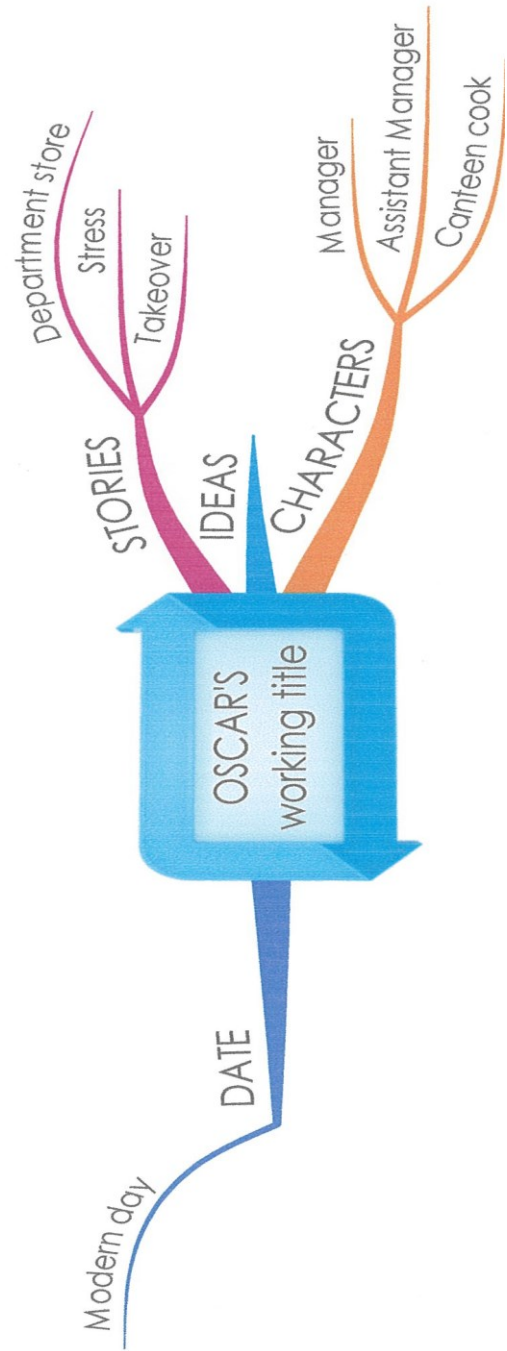
What I'm learning is that writers have different levels for setting out their pre-writing ideas. Planning can range from knowing very little at the start to total planning of every scene.

Mind mapping software has advanced the system to another level. Although it is still the brain that comes up with all the ideas, the latest software can allow a mind map to be drawn on the computer screen. The advantages are that they can be saved in a file and the information can be transmitted to other mind maps. Computer mind maps allow you to store vast amounts of data in mind map form, to cross-reference that data, to shift branches around from one part of the mind map to another, to rearrange entire mind maps in the light of new information.

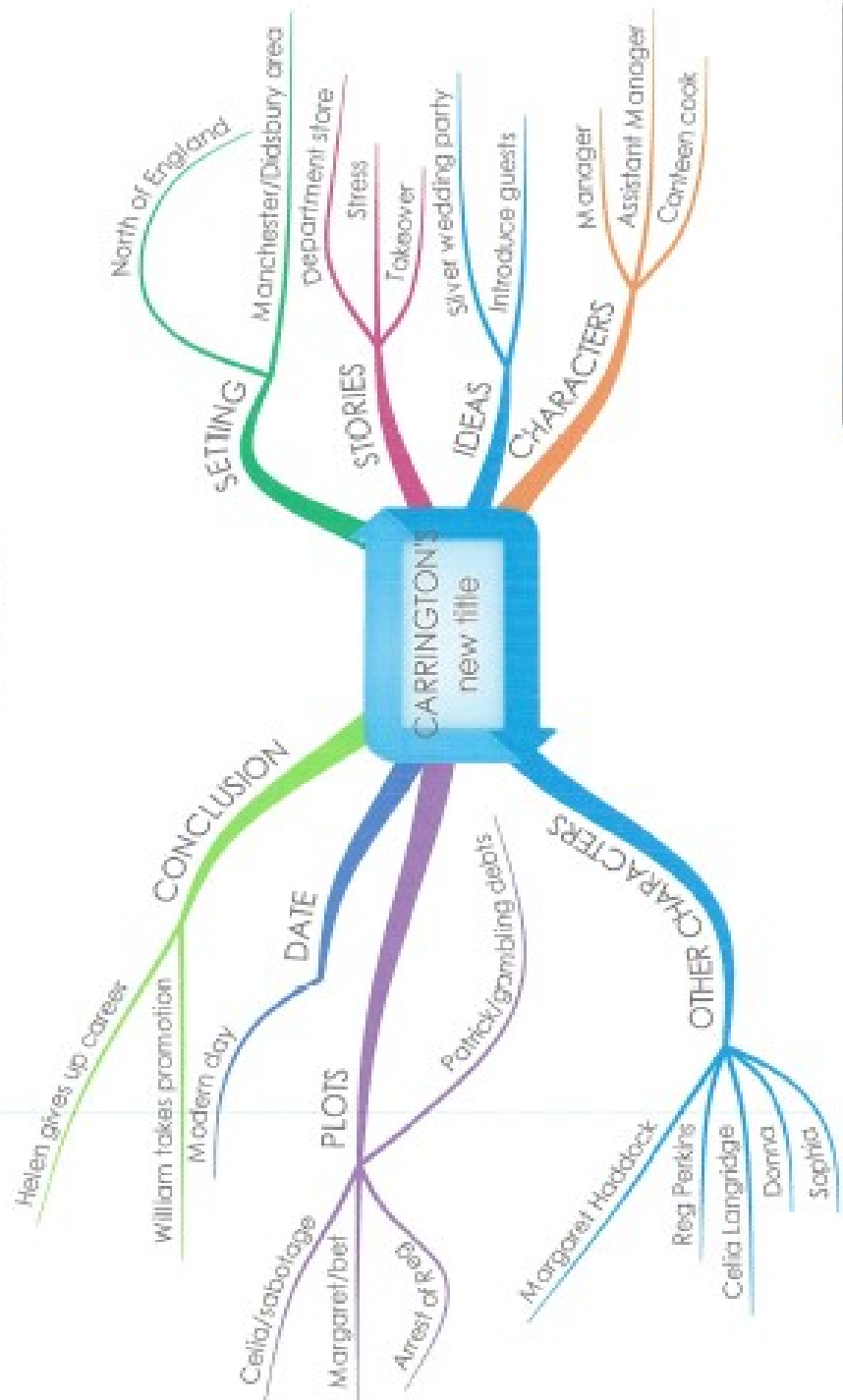
I have tried Tony Buzan's software system as can be seen from the three mind map diagrams that follow. It was useful to map out my plans using different colours on the screen. However, I do find that writing by hand is a better solution for me. I somehow feel that a computer system at this early stage of planning can somehow create a barrier between me and my thoughts.

In the writing of *Carrington's* mind mapping followed on from brainstorming. This system helped me to make further connections and literally the ideas started to flow. The following computer mind maps show the changes made as I created new ideas.

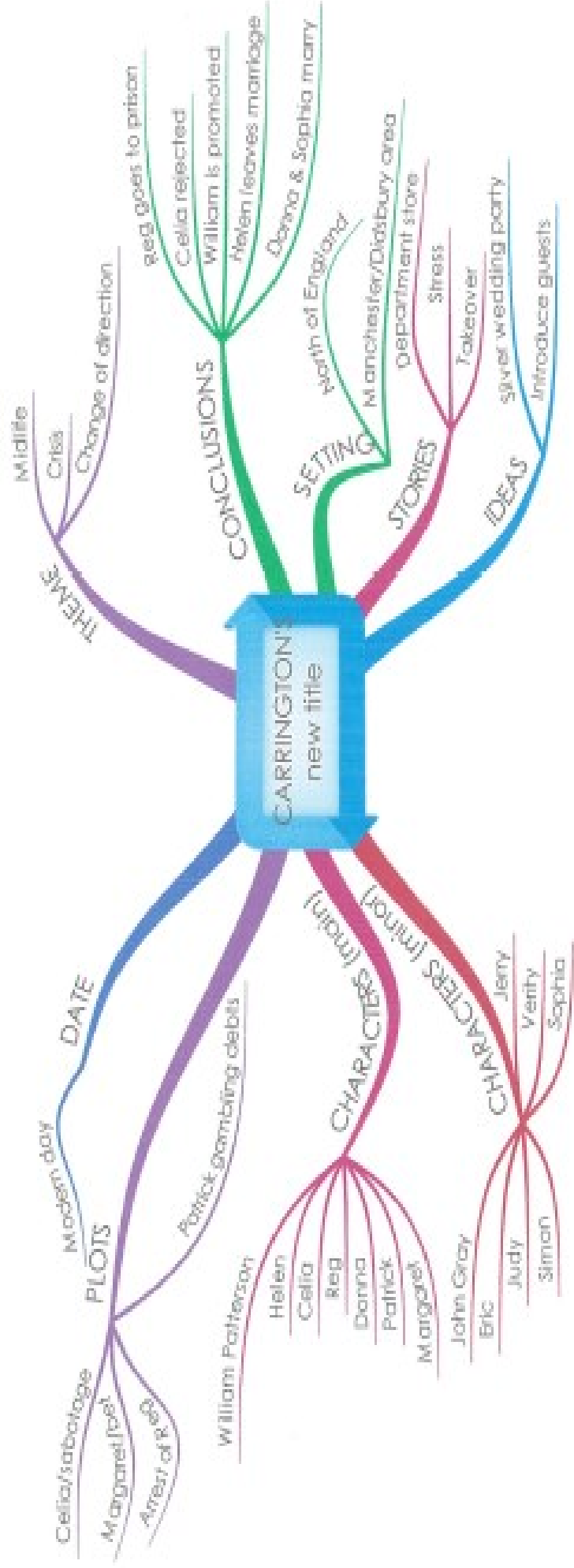
MIND MAP (1)



MIND MAP (2)



MIND MAP (3)



No.1 map

Here I create my early ideas with the working title being Oscar's and some small amount of story line, three characters, setting and date.⁶

No. 2 map

This shows the progression to the new title of Carrington's, more characters, ideas, plots, and conclusion.⁷

No. 3 map

This has moved on to the theme of mid-life, characters have been divided into main and minor, and the conclusion has been changed.⁸

What my research on mind-mapping has taught me is that it can be an important tool for planning in advance. Firstly it is a natural progression from brainstorming. The original brainstorming ideas can be transferred to a mind map but the difference is they are then segregated into different areas such as plot, sub-plots, characters, and story lines. The mind-map is an ongoing concern and not a fixed or rigid plan and items can be added or amended as more connections are made. I found when I needed to invent new characters or ideas I was able to simply make more branches and twigs to accommodate my fresh ideas. Eventually a whole novel can be condensed on to one page. The writer, of course, has a lot of hard work ahead as mind mapping is only part of the process. However there is another planning system that goes much further than mind mapping called the Snowflake Method.

⁶ Mind Map No. 1 created on Buzan iMindmap 3 on 7 September 2009

⁷ Mind Map No. 2 created on Buzan iMindmap 3 on 12 September 2009

⁸ Mind Map No. 3 created on Buzan iMindmap 3 on 15 September 2009

The Snowflake Method

The Snowflake Method was invented by American author and physicist, Randal Ingermanson (2005, p.1), to assist writers in planning their novels. The idea he puts forward is to plan the whole novel with story line, theme, characters, scenes, plots and chapters before starting to write. This process can take up to one month. He believes this method of pre-planning eliminates the re-writing of numerous drafts and gives the author focus. The Snowflake Method takes its name from the six sided snowflake (fractal).

The building of the snowflake ⁹



a. b. c. d.

Each shape shows the addition of new ideas to the original frame – thus building a snowflake. The ten-steps of the Snowflake Method are:

- 1. Write a one sentence summary of your novel**
- 2. Expand this sentence into a full paragraph**
- 3. Create a story line for each character**

⁹⁹ Ingermanson, R 'How to write a novel using the Snowflake Method'
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>

4. Now expand each sentence of the summary paragraph into full paragraphs
5. Write a longer description of each character
6. Expand synopsis of novel
7. Show how characters have changed
8. Make a list of scenes for each chapter
9. Create a spreadsheet (optional)
10. Start writing the novel

I used the 10-step system for my novel *Carrington's*. The various stages and journey I went through are detailed below.

<u>STEP 1</u> Write a one sentence summary of your novel
Store manager William Patterson feels his life is spiralling out of control when Carrington's is threatened by a takeover and his wife returns to her career, he Looks to the beautiful Celia Langridge for comfort.

The writing of this one sentence for Step 1 was not an easy task but turned out to be twofold. At this point I only had a vague idea that my novel was to be a story set in a department store. Firstly, it enabled me to decide to make William and Helen the main characters. Secondly, I decided to make the threat of a takeover, Helen returning to work, and meeting Celia Langridge as the main problems that William would face.

<u>STEP 2</u> Expand this sentence into a full paragraph

William finds his life falling apart when his store is threatened by a takeover by the American firm Rightways. His wife Helen adds to his problems by Announcing she is returning to work. He becomes increasingly isolated and With the addition of staff problems he turns to Celia Langridge for comfort.

Step 2 allowed me to expand on my original ideas and show how William's life will start to spiral out of control.

<u>STEP 3</u> Create a story line for each character	
<p><u>William Patterson</u></p> <p>William fears for his future prospects over the store takeover. Reacts strongly to Helen's return to work. Befriends Caroline Langridge and starts an affair. Gets promoted to Area Manager.</p>	<p><u>Helen Patterson</u></p> <p>Frustrated at the empty nest situation she returns to work in a legal firm as a PA to chauvinist boss Simon. Travels to London on business, meets Gerry who offers her training as a solicitor.</p>
<p><u>Celia Langridge</u></p> <p>Celia, a bitter divorcee, is determined to have William as her next husband. When he ditches her she starts her personal sabotage of Carrington's.</p>	<p><u>Margaret Haddock</u></p> <p>Staff canteen cook with a dreary life looking after her invalid mother. Her only friend is a bottle of wine in the evening. Becomes victim of a cruel bet between Toby and Patrick. Finds her mother dead. Inherits a large sum of money that changes her life.</p>

<p><u>Reg Perkins</u></p> <p>Night security man at Carrington's. Falls asleep on duty and his cigarette causes a fire. Photographs young girls in the park. Arrested when a local student goes missing. When made redundant gets a job as a janitor at a block of luxury flats. Spies on female residents. Arrested and goes to court.</p>	<p><u>Patrick</u></p> <p>Manager of menswear addicted to gambling. Sets a bet with Toby that he can bed Margaret. Later regrets his actions. Margaret forgives him and pays off his gambling debts on condition he seeks help.</p>
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Step 3 enabled me to create storylines for my main characters. It also made me think about the personality of each of them. This in turn helped me to get to know my characters better and move forward to invent ideas of more dramatic events to come in the novel.

STEP 4. Now expand each sentence of the summary paragraph into full paragraphs.

First Sentence

William Paterson comes under increasing pressure with the possibility of the store takeover. He finds himself irritated by the frequent visits of Area Manager, John Gray, who he feels is not telling him all the facts. And Rightways, in William's opinion, is a cheap budget company that will ruin the high class reputation of Carrington's where he has worked so hard to maintain the image.

This expansion of one sentence into a paragraph gave me the opportunity to seek out the future stress that William would come under at work.

Second Sentence

Helen Patterson has been frustrated for a long time over having no career. This has been exacerbated by her only child, Catherine, getting married and moving to Canada. She now takes the opportunity to put some structure back into her life and takes a job as a PA in a legal firm. She is not expecting the chauvinist attitude of her young boss and soon realises she has a struggle ahead to survive. When on a business trip to London she meets Gerry who offers her the opportunity to train as a solicitor in the firm.

Helen now starts to find her feet in the working world and is determined to take up the training as a solicitor. At this stage in the process I found I was getting to know the character of Helen very well. She was becoming a very important player in the story. This gave me the opportunity to expand her role in my novel.

Third Sentence

Celia Langridge enters William's life at the moment his marriage is starting to flounder. In Celia he finds the warmth he feels he needs. But Celia is not the woman she appears to be and will cause William more stress in his already troubled life.

Celia becomes attached to William and her possessive personality starts to come to the surface. At this point I realised that I had a very devious character in the story. This allowed me to create some dramatic scenes through her jealousy of Helen and the sabotage she undertakes at the store.

STEP 5 Write a longer description of each character

William

William was the only child of a middle class family. His father was an accountant and his mother a homemaker. He went to a private school and then on to Durham University where he studied mathematics. Here he met his wife Helen who was studying law. He joined Carrington's on a graduate scheme. He married Helen and she became pregnant straight away. He did not want his wife to work and insisted she became a homemaker like his mother had always been. He rose through the ranks and at the age of 45 was the manager of the largest branch in the North West of England. But being a workaholic left little time for home and family. His goal is to become Area Manager and have numerous stores under his command.

Helen

Helen was the only child of a middle class family. Her father was the managing director of a plastics firm and her mother was a teacher. She went to a private school and then on to Durham University where she studied law. On leaving University she was employed by a law firm in Manchester to train as a solicitor. But after getting married she became pregnant. She enjoyed the first few years of motherhood and got involved with a few charitable events. But once her daughter had started school she felt increasingly isolated and it was difficult to make permanent friendships with travelling round with William's job.

Celia Langridge

Celia was born in London to a wealthy family. Her father was a director of a pharmaceutical company and her mother was a socialite. Celia was spoilt and pampered. But when she was 21 her life changed dramatically when her father went bankrupt and her mother died shortly afterwards. She looked for a husband to provide the security she needed and married John Haley a merchant banker. But the marriage later folded when he met a younger woman and left. A few years later she married the barrister Paul Langridge. She enjoyed a luxurious life, money was no object, and she would entertain clients for her husband. She

became an excellent skier and horsewoman. But after several years she discovered Paul was having an affair. He had salted away a great deal of money. Celia was left with only a small flat. She became very bitter and spent a lot of her time complaining in shops. She had few friends.

Margaret Haddock

Margaret was born into a working class family. The only child of Tom a labourer and Grace who has suffered from arthritis since being a child. She went to the local secondary modern where she was not particularly bright, but she did like art and would spend hours sketching in her room. She was overweight and did not have many friends. She was expected to do a lot of work around the house to help her mother. She went to work in the staff canteen at Carrington's. After her father died she also took on the role of carer. Her weight increases and she neglects her appearance. The only enjoyment she has is watching soaps on the television and drinking too much wine.

Reg Perkins

Reg was born into a working class family in Manchester. He went to a local secondary modern school but excelled at nothing. He left school at 16 and worked on a building site for a few years. He then worked as a bouncer at a night club in the city centre but was eventually sacked for being too aggressive. He then joined Carrington's as a night security man. A loner.

Patrick

Patrick was born into a working class family in Bolton. His father was unemployed for many years and his mother was a cleaner. He was the fourth of six children. Money was short and his mother often took three jobs to make ends meet. After leaving school he worked as a trainee electrician but soon got bored. He then joined Carrington's in the Menswear department where he found he had a talent for selling. Soon he rose to supervisor and eventually to manager. But he has a gambling problem that is spiralling out of control.

Step 5 brought my characters to life. Once I'd invented their background, personality, and habits, I felt I knew them personally and this enabled me to think more seriously whether they would act differently in the situations I had planned for them. For example Reg Perkins has become very creepy, Patrick has a gambling problem, Margaret has sacrificed her own happiness for the sake of her mother, and Celia has lost her status in society through divorce.

STEP 6 Expand synopsis of novel

William Patterson is stressed and facing a mid-life crisis amid the possible takeover by Rightways. He fears losing his job if made redundant. He is furious with his wife for returning to work. He meets Celia and is flattered by her attention. They start an affair.

John Gray, Area Manager, continues to irritate William with his smug manner and controlling ways. Helen struggles as PA to her chauvinistic boss Simon. She starts to face up to Williams tantrums and now wants a life of her own. She meets Gerry on a London trip and is soon able to take up training as a solicitor. William starts an affair with Celia, unaware of her manipulating nature. He ditches her and she takes revenge on the store by leaking news of the takeover and sabotaging stock at the store.

Margaret upsets Toby by flirting and humiliating him at William and Helen's party. She gets drunk and sleeps with Patrick. But he is not interested in any further commitment... Her mother dies and this sets her free for the first time.

Security man Reg Perkins photographs girls in the park. One girl goes missing and he is arrested on suspicion of abduction. He is later released but turns to the Internet and discovers porn. He is made redundant and gets a position as a janitor at a luxury block of flats. He spies on female residents and ends up in court.

Step 6 enabled me to see the bigger picture of my novel. Each character was put into their own slot and this helped me to see where each one was going. For example Reg Perkin's hobby takes him from photographing young girls in the park to getting arrested on suspicion of abduction.

STEP 7 Show how characters have changed

William loses Helen but is promoted to Area Manager.

Helen moves her life forward to one of independence.

Celia continues to feel a victim of male manipulation.

Margaret makes the most of her new financial independence.

Patrick seeks forgiveness from Margaret and faces up to his gambling addiction.

Reg gets his comeuppance at last.

Step 7 enabled me to see how my characters were evolving. Witnessing these changes allowed me to change direction in some of the storylines. For example Margaret, after the death of her mother, is able to sample the freedom she has never had before. Celia continues to feel a victim of male manipulation and is in denial of her own faults as a gold digger.

STEP 8 Make a list of scenes for each chapter

1. Silver wedding party
Margaret humiliates Toby
William announces surprise holiday
Helen has taken a job
2. Layout of Carrington's store
Area Manager announces takeover
William takes John Gray out for lunch
3. Helen's first day at work
William furious when she is late home
4. William goes to Godson's wedding
Meets Celia
Reg falls asleep/store on fire
5. Helen told about London trip

Celia returns item to store
6. Staff meeting for department heads Margaret looks after her mother
7. Toby and Patrick plot the bet about Margaret
8. Donna visits father in care home Margaret's mother has fall Celia and William get closer
9. Reg photographs girls in park Celia accompanies William to hospital
10. Margaret enjoys freedom while her mother is in hospital Celia invites William to stay with her Patrick pays attention to Margaret
11. Celia and William start affair Student goes missing Eric telephones police about Reg
12. William returns home from Celia's flat
13. Helen notices difference in William Reg formally arrested Margaret has date with Patrick
14. Reg has further police interviews Patrick sleeps with Margaret William sneaks out to visit Celia
15. Missing student turns up Helen has interview with senior partner
16. Donna and Sophia have meal together Celia buys expensive lingerie Celia's hatred of Helen increases
17. Reg returns home Margaret learns about the bet William and Celia go away for the weekend Helen rushed to hospital
18. Donna and Sophia buy a flat William returns from weekend away William discovers Helen in hospital Margaret's mother found dead
19. William fetches Helen home from hospital William finishes affair with Celia

	Store takeover to go ahead
20.	Margaret attends mother's funeral Reg takes computer lessons and finds porn sites
21.	Margaret inherits large sum of money Celia starts sabotage at store
22.	Margaret flies off on holiday and meets Pablo William gets promoted to Area Manager Helen finds out about William's affair Reg gets his revenge on neighbour Eric
23.	Helen confronts William about his affair with Celia
24.	Reg gets job as janitor at luxury flats
25.	Helen tells William the marriage is over
26.	<u>Six months later</u> Helen established in legal training Reg appears in court
27.	William now living in Lancaster Thinks Lorna she will make a good company wife

Step 8 created the spine of *Carrington's*. I was able to use this as a launch pad. However, at this stage it was just a guide. Many changes would be made over the course of writing the novel as characters evolved, storylines altered, and new ideas created. But the spine was flexible and allowed for these many changes of direction.

STEP 9 – Optional choice to create a spreadsheet

Step 9 was not taken. I felt at this stage that I had a deep understanding of my novel and that a spread sheet was not necessary and would be a somewhat mechanical approach.

STEP 10 – Start writing the novel

Step 10 was reached after one month. Having worked my way through the steps of the Snowflake method I was ready to start writing my novel. However, I did not realise at this stage that I would have a lot more work ahead of me. As I put pen to paper it became apparent that I needed to invent some new characters in order to make connections between already established characters. For example Verity was invented to link Helen, William and Celia. I would also find that many new story lines would need to be introduced as the novel progressed.

What the Snowflake Method has taught me is that it is an efficient way to pre-plan a novel. By using this method for *Carrington's* I was able to avoid the numerous false starts and re-writes that my first novel *Coffees* demanded due to doing no pre-planning. The Snowflake Method put me in control of my writing process. The month of preparation not only gave me the opportunity to pre-plan *Carrington's* but also the time to think about where I wanted my book to go. Even before I had produced the skeleton from which to work I felt I knew my characters very well. They were evolving into real people. This in turn gave me the opportunity to alter or bring in new story lines to accommodate the changes in many of the characters. The whole process felt similar to a dummy run, a rehearsal of the real thing. On completion of Step 8 the skeleton of my novel was formed. It was flexible and I found I was able to add or delete scenes as I wanted and as I thought necessary. This allowed me to create new incidents along the way which added more drama. However, I do have a few criticisms of

the Snowflake method. It must be stressed that all writers work in different ways. Some have adapted the method to suit their way of writing. But, some writers do not like to pre-plan their novels at all and therefore this method is not for them. I also found that the Snowflake Method does not encourage the writer to allow for the connection of characters within the story. For example I found that once I had my skeleton in place and put pen to paper I needed to invent some new characters such as Verity to make a connection between Helen, William and Celia. Then I found I needed a younger woman to be the love interest for both Toby and Patrick – and for this I created Kirsty in cosmetics. And to be able to display the home life of Reg I invented next door neighbour Eric who blows the whistle after spotting photographs of the missing student on the bedroom wall in Reg's flat. Also the method is a little unbalanced - it is excellent on the forming of characters but less so on plot. But overall, once the planned framework was established, it did not stifle my creativity. It gave me the freedom to see where my creative processes would lead.

My research into planning has taught me that having a well-functioning planning system in place is beneficial to the writing of a novel. The tackling of a novel can be daunting. We might have a rough idea of a storyline, what we want to say, and where we want it to go – but getting from A – Z requires a well thought out plan where we have characters, plots, sub-plots, scenes and storyline.

A plan sets boundaries. When I started the pre-planning system of the Snowflake Method I was asked to describe the storyline of my book in one sentence. At the time this proved impossible and I realised that up to that point I didn't even know who the story was about. I just had a vague idea of a story set within a department store and didn't know what direction I wanted to take it.

Having to come up with my storyline in one sentence made me realise that I wanted William and Helen Patterson as the main characters and it would follow their separate ambitions.

An outline is vital because you need to get your story across to the reader and take them on that journey with you. A plan helps a writer to capture and organise ideas. It gives the writer the opportunity to create many ideas at the same time and to see how these can be fitted into the overall project. It is also a chance to store ideas that may fit in later in the story.

A plan is about making choices and being able to clarify your intentions. Once a plan is done it can be divided into smaller sections to avoid any feelings of being overwhelmed. It will keep a writer on target and let them see if they have too much or too little material. Once my planned framework of *Carrington's* was established it did not stifle my creativity. It gave me the freedom to see where my creative processes would lead.

Restricted Planning

Restricted planning can be seen in the National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo). Held each November the competition gives writers the opportunity to write an on-line 50,000 word novel in one month. The brainchild of American Chris Baty, NaNoWriMo began in 1999 with 140 entries. The number has now risen to over 100,000. Entry is free and there are no prizes. The point of the exercise is to get people writing. So far fifteen writers have been published. NaNoWriMo is a non-profit organisation and raises money selling themed merchandise to aid literary projects around the world. It runs a laptop lending service and literary programmes in schools throughout America,

and also provides funds to build libraries throughout South East Asia.

According to Dan Brodnitz (2009, p4) the organizer Chris Baty defines a novel as a minimum of 50,000 words of fiction. The following diagram outlines the success of the competition.¹⁰

Year	Participants	Winners
1999	21	6
2000	140	29
2001	5,000	700
2002	13,500	2,100
2003	25,500	3,500
2004	42,000	6,000
2005	59,000	9,769
2006	79,813	12,948
2007	101,510	15,333
2008	119,301	21,683
2009	167,150	32,178

Number of words officially logged by participants¹¹

2004	428,164,975
2005	714,227,354
2006	982,564,701
2007	1,187,931,929

¹⁰¹⁰ 'National Novel Writing Month,' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National-Novel_Writing_Month](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Novel_Writing_Month)

¹¹ 'National Novel Writing Month,' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Novel_Writing_Month

2008	1,643,343,993
2009	2,427,190,537

There are positives and negatives to this fast paced, no pre-planning form of writing. In an interview with G. Faulkner (2008 p.1) Chris Baty, a proponent himself of revision and multiple revisions, emphasized that the month of writing is truly about churning out a first draft, not a finished product. An example of this can be seen by entrant Lynn Jacobs. Executive Director of NaNoWriMo, Grant Faulkner (2008, p.1) states that Lynn Jacobs, a teacher/consultant with the Northern California Writing Project, had always wanted to write a novel but was sceptical when she entered. Her novel was about a dream seller who has a clothes line by the river. People come and put a donation in a pot and take down a cloth from the line, and that's their dream. The cloth always goes back on the line the next morning, but no one knows where it went. Chris Baty explains that although Jacobs didn't plan what she'd write each day, a novel that could have remained in an abstract foetal stage for perpetuity suddenly came to life. The setting appeared. Characters emerged and started to take shape. Not everyone is so positive. Rebecca Miller (2011, p.1) suggests that, for more experienced writers, writing between a thousand and two thousand words a day ought not to be too demanding, but the pace doesn't allow the new writer to collect him/herself when the story bogs down, to learn what might be the problem, and to discover how to get rid of it. In addition, new writers might be fooled into thinking that their winning manuscript is now ready for publication. Jennie Nash (2012, p2) is similarly scathing and suggests that the odds of writing anything other people would want to read when writing at that speed are very low and the

amount of effort it would take to edit anything written at that speed would quickly negate the time saved by writing it fast.

Author Alan Hollinghurst prefers to plan his writing. When interviewed by Peter Terzian in the Paris Review he said:

When I get the sense that a new book is beginning, I
Start a notebook into which I put anything that might
Seem to be relevant, which could be a large-scale plot
Idea, something overheard on the bus, or a descriptive
Phrase that came to me on a walk. I don't actually
Start writing the book until out of all this has emerged
A pretty clear plan for the whole thing. (The Art of
Fiction No. 214)

Here the author shows his preference for planning in advance of writing his novel.

As part of my research I followed a participant, Tim Sored (2013 p.1), winner of NaNoWriMo in 2007 and 2009. He states that routine is the most important part for him. He discovered that if he wrote at the same time each day (and having bought a large coffee from the local deli as a treat), he was able to set off a kind of Pavlovian effect. Then the writing saliva would begin to flow and his fingers would begin to pound out on the keyboard.

In 2008 – a year in which he did not win - he attempted an experiment that he called 'The Movement,' whereby the idea was just to write and push himself. But he found the result was that characters never developed fully and he didn't have an overall character in mind. He didn't even reach the required word count of 50,000, and although some story did develop, he splintered off in too many directions. The following year, Sored (2013, p.1) was more successful again. He explains:

2009, I won again. With me I have learned
that I need to have some clear idea of my
protagonist. After one false start I discovered him.

Then I used my routine of time and coffee to reach my goal. This book is called *Writing with Wine*. I am more or less in the middle of my second draft at the moment which I am discovering is even more of a challenge than the first draft. (p.3)

This participant's experience in the NaNoWriMo competition suggests that restricted planning can be a great learning process. Due to the complete freedom of the competition to produce a 50,000 word novel in one month, a writer can experiment with different approaches each year. Tim Sored found that by just writing and pushing himself that he failed to reach the necessary word count and his attempt at a novel went off in different directions. With this information on board he changed writing tactics. The following year he had a much clearer idea of who his protagonist was and this gave his writing more direction and he went on to win the competition.

The NaNoWriMo approach is clearly about quantity as opposed to quality. It is a project in which planning is put aside and creativity allowed complete freedom because any form of framework, apart from the deadline of one month, is taken away. The only people the writers are competing against are themselves. This offers is an opportunity for anyone who believes they have a book in them to abandon any pre-planning and let their creativity take over. Of course planning will not be totally abandoned because with a month-long project such as this, the brain will, during the intervals between writing, inevitably be filing information already written and, either consciously or unconsciously, be planning future ideas. In this situation, planning and creativity (using both hemispheres of the brain) work together. For myself as a writer, I'd prefer to spend a month pre-planning a novel rather than four weeks typing out an unplanned story that I would have to go back over and try to sort out into a future

book. But this is only my personal view and I feel sure that many writers or would be writers like to enter the competition to see if they can produce a novel and to test their creative abilities.

Lack of Creativity and Writer's Block

Creativity can dry up in the writing of a novel and this is referred to as 'writer's block.'

Script writer Gene Perret (2012, pp 1-2) argues writer's block is based totally on fear. Fear that we won't be able to write a complete novel, will not be able to interest publishers, and are not good enough. He argues further that once a book is started, it can be a problem to maintain the enthusiasm. There is the problem of being too much of a perfectionist, and also being put off by criticism from others. The solution to writer's block, he says, is to force oneself to write.

Many of us think we have a book in us but, when it comes to writing, it can be a very daunting experience. And fear of failure is very much at the core. How do we go about putting a whole novel together? We might have a brilliant idea but that idea has to be crafted and worked into a readable story. And fear does not just apply to first time writers. Published writers have a great deal of pressure on them to repeat the successes of previous books. They often fear they will run out of ideas and disappoint their readers. And writers who experience a three book deal from a publisher are put under enormous pressure to reach deadlines.

But, writer and educator, Julie Coan (2009, pp 2-10) blames writer's block on not planning. She argues the case that most people who don't plan their

novel do not finish it. She believes planning creates a security that allows creativity to bloom. She sets out the following reasons:

- (a) Even if you start out with the most brilliant idea for your novel, it's easy to get bogged down in the details once you start to write. Sometimes, there seem to be too many choices and often there may not be enough. If you've planned ahead, you can refer to your plan to see what should happen next. No more writer's block.
- (b) Planning can help you write a novel quickly. You want to finish your rough draft as quickly as possible. It's important to get it finished so you can achieve that feeling of satisfaction of completing a long project.
- (c) Planning before you write a novel can help avoid extensive rewrites. When you are writing without a plan, you may begin to write in a certain direction. Then you realise that's not where you want the novel to go or you reach a dead end. Then you have to backtrack and write those scenes again or replace them with new ones. When you have a plan, your rewriting phase is more about fine-tuning.
- (d) When you plan before you write, you end up with a better novel. You'll be able to weave in subtle connections between the characters that have no place or subplots that leave the reader hanging because they were never resolved.
- (e) Planning before you write keeps you from getting discouraged and giving up. A huge number of people begin a novel and never finish it. When your novel starts to get complicated and you're feeling discouraged, you can look at your plan. Suddenly you realise the ending is already in

sight. You know that you have a great novel because you have a great plan. All it's going to take is a little time and effort.

A novel is a big project and you can, as Coan says, get bogged down with ideas before you start to write. Having a plan eliminates all the ideas that are going nowhere and helps the writer focus and get direction. Planning also shortens the time it takes to write a novel as there will be less wasted drafts and fewer re-writes. A plan gives the writer an overall view of their novel and from this angle the writer can see the peaks and troughs and where to fit in the sub-plots. Having a plan does not mean that things can't change once you begin to write. As characters converse and interact you may discover a new way to solve their problems.

In the writing of *Carrington's* I found this to be very true. Despite an enormous amount of planning, I discovered when I started writing that once my characters started to interact with each other I had to change the direction of many of them. For example, my character Helen Patterson was originally only going to be a small player in the story but, realising that she played a big part in William's life, she needed more story of her own. I therefore decided to create her as a woman longing to have a career of her own and this, in turn, made the power struggle in the Patterson marriage so much more interesting. I now realise that during the planning process I did not concentrate enough on bringing the personalities of my characters to my readers. The interaction between characters is vitally important to show their inner emotions.

I feel that not planning can be a cause of writer's block. When writers start to write with no idea of where their story is going, the result is that the story can dry up and have no direction. This can create large amounts of re-drafting. I believe you can have the best idea in the world but a story has to be crafted, be well thought out, and rise off the page if it is going to work for the author and the reader.

My own experience of writer's block occurred in chapter 3 of *Carrington's*. I found it difficult to set the opening scene for Helen Patterson's first day at work where I wanted to display the nervousness she felt at starting a new job. My first idea had been to have her travelling by train into the city centre and observing other commuters. But somehow the scene appeared too slow. This chapter, despite being only the third in my novel, was becoming a stumbling point. My writing was static and I could not move on. However, I use the intercutting style, whereby I feature three or four characters in separate scenes within each chapter, and as I had planned each section in advance with Randall Ingermanson's Snowflake Method (discussed previously on page 271), I was able to move forward and write the final scene. In this scene William loses his temper with Helen being home late from work. Writing this last section gave me the idea of showing just how determined Helen was to take her new job seriously. I was then able to return to the first section and incorporate Helen's determination through the fears, frustrations, and difficulties of her new job.

From my research I have learned that writer's block can be based on fear of not finishing a novel and also lack of planning. Authors come under pressure to complete their work, either from themselves or publishing deadlines. Reasons such as fear of failure do exist but I feel that a large part of writer's block is due

to a lack of planning. When writing *Carrington's* I made meticulous plans using the Snowflake Method. This set the skeleton of my story and was at the core of my writing. I was able at difficult moments to return to this guide and re-arrange scenes, add new ones, and even invent new characters that were needed to connect with already established ones. If I had not made this plan before starting to write I would have struggled for a much longer period and the whole process would have involved numerous amounts of re-drafting. But I also have to address the situation that although I did a large amount of planning for *Carrington's* I still came across writer's block in chapter 3. The problem was caused by not realising that Helen had evolved from a subservient wife to an independent feisty woman.

PART 3 - CREATIVITY

What is creativity? According to Robert E. Franken (1982, p.396) creativity is designed as the tendency to generate or recognise ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others. In order to be creative, you need to be able to generate new possibilities or new alternatives.

I believe novelists need the ability to generate and recognise ideas in order to write a story and invent characters. A novel is not a straight forward story – it has twists and turns involving plot and pace. Often we create ideas from our own background. An example of this can be seen in the interview I conducted with the author Helen Sea:

If I'm looking to develop a character something from my past will sort of cover that or allow me to be more creative and add more meaningful content. (p.454).

Novelists vary in the way they work on their books. Some plan and some let the creativity flow and see where it takes them. In my interview with Clare Dudman I asked her if she thought it was possible to be creative within a planned framework:

No. I think it has to be planned to some extent but grammar and punctuation, grammar and genre don't come into it. I think this would be very inhibiting. I think it is important that you let ideas flow. (p.403)

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Creativity - Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (2009, pp 25-26), looks at the ways that creativity is commonly used. His research has discovered people who experience the world in novel and original ways are personally creative individuals whose perceptions are fresh, whose judgements are insightful, who may make important discoveries that only they know about.

Theories of Creativity

Looking to the past for sources of creativity the theories of creativity have focused on a variety of aspects. Most ancient cultures, including Ancient Greece, China and India lacked the concept of creativity. They saw art as discovery and not creation. An early Western conception of creativity was the Biblical story of creation in *Genesis*.

However, the modern sense of creativity did not arise until the Renaissance. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, humans were not considered to have the ability to create something new except as an expression of God's work. It was during the Renaissance that creativity was first seen from the abilities of an individual.

By the eighteenth century and the age of enlightenment creativity was linked with the concept of imagination. But the study of creativity was not begun until the late nineteenth century and was inspired by the individual differences inspired by Darwinism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's mathematicians and scientists such as Hermann von Helmholtz and Henri Poincare began to discuss the creative process.

CREATIVE PROCESSES

In 1926 Graham Wallas researched the creative process and, according to Williams and Stockmyer (2012, p.11), he described what happens as people approach problems with the objective of coming up with creative solutions. He described his four-stage process as follows.¹²

Preparation Stage	Define the problem. Gather any information the solution needs. Set up criteria for verification
Incubation Stage	Step back from problem. Let our minds contemplate.
Illumination Stage	Ideas arise from the mind to provide basis of a creative response. Often a brief period with a rush of insight.
Verification Stage	The final stage. Carry out activities to demonstrate whether or not what has emerged satisfies the need defined in the preparation stage.

The diagram demonstrates the first and last stages are left brain activities.

The second and third stages are right brain activities.

¹² Williams, R and Stockmyer, J 'Graham Wallas' model'
http://members.optusnet.com/charles57/Creative/Brain/wallas_htm

I would see Graham Wallas' model of the creative process as the process that many authors would enter when preparing and writing their novels. The preparation stage would involve the initial ideas, the gathering of material, and verifying whether the story will work. The incubation stage is a time when an author will step back from their work and contemplate what they have written. During the illumination phase new ideas and changes may come along to improve the work. The verification stage is where the writer will decide whether the ideas he/she has put down on paper meet the needs of what they set out to do.

An example of the incubation stage of this process can be seen in an interview with Alice Munro that featured in the Paris Review. Author Alice Monroe told the interviewer Jeanne McCulloch:

Usually I have a lot of acquaintance with the story before I start writing it. When I didn't have regular time to give to writing, stories would just be working in my head for so long that when I started to write I was deep into them. (The Art of Fiction No. 137)

Here the author has been incubating her ideas over a period of time. This is followed by the illumination stage where ideas start to flow.

Geoffrey Petty (2013, p.7) author of *Teaching Today: A Practical Guide* and one of Britain's leading experts on teaching methods, puts forward a different theory of the creative process with six phases.¹³

Inspiration	Researching and generating many
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¹³ Petty, G 'Creativity,' <http://geoffpetty.com/creativity/>

	ideas
Clarification	Focus on goals
Evaluation	Review work and learn from it
Distillation	Decide which ideas to work on
Incubation	Leave the work alone
Perspiration	Work determinedly on best ideas

However, for this creative process Petty states there is no particular order and many of the phases can be visited several times. He also brings in the interesting point that one of the main difficulties for creative people is that the different phases require radically different mind sets, each of which is difficult to sustain without deliberate effort and to generate a large number of ideas you need to be deeply engrossed, fearless, and free. He describes this as spontaneous, risk taking, intuitive and improvisational. I agree with this idea as in the writing of my own novel *Carrington's* I had to go over the phases of inspiration, evaluation, distillation, and incubation. Although my novel was planned I was always searching for inspiration because the writing of a novel is not a set article – characters and ideas change and evolve as the writing progresses. I also needed to evaluate what I'd written and reviewing my work was a regular process. Distillation was also present as I often stepped back to see if my ideas were working. Incubation was an ongoing phase as at the end of the writing day I

continually thought about what I'd written and overnight many new ideas would come about.

But, a further view put forward by Sir Ken Robinson (2011, p.154), an internationally recognised leader in the development of creativity, innovation and human resources. He suggests that creative processes draw from all areas of human consciousness. They are not strictly logical nor are they wholly emotional. He further states that the reason why creativity can often be preceded by intuitive leaps is precisely that it draws from areas of mind and consciousness that are not wholly regulated by rational thought. In the creative state, we can access these different areas of our minds. This is why ideas often come to mind without our thinking about them: why it's often better to sleep on a problem or put it, as we say, to the back of our minds.

The creative process put forward by Ken Robinson is, I believe, exactly how writers work and often can't explain. When producing a novel the mind tends to work in a way that is not totally logical or emotional. Often ideas are incubated overnight and that is why we make progress the following day with innovative ideas. His ideas of putting our minds into a creative state certainly follow the results of Charlotte Doyle's study of the creative process in literary fiction writers (1998, p.2) and her discovery of writers alternating between a "writing realm" in which the writer withdraws from everyday life with the intention to write and a "fictionworld" in which the story elements come to the writer as narrative improvisation unfolds.

A similar view is also held by author Guy Claxton (1997, pp 60-61) who explores the differences in the speed of thinking and solving. He examines the

experiments of Steven Smith at A&M, a co-educational public research University in Texas. He states ‘the kind of problems which Smith set his subjects were designed to mimic one of the key features of real-life creative insight: the discovery of a meaningful, but non-obvious, connection between different elements of the situation. So-called ‘rebus’ problems arrange words and images in such a way that they suggest an everyday phrase.’ For example:

The Rebus Problem¹⁴

ME	JUST	YOU
represents spatially the phrase ‘just between me and you		
OR		
TIMING	TIME ING	
is a visual pun on the expression split second timing		

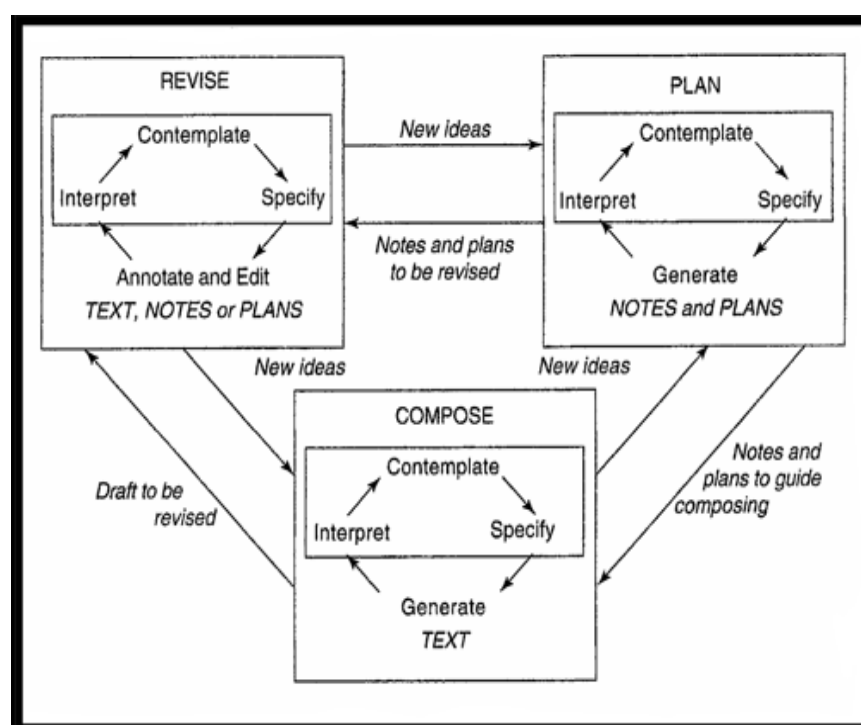
When volunteers had failed to solve the problems straight away and when again in five minutes there was no improvement, he then tested after a longer delay of fifteen minutes. The results improved by 30%. Claxton sees incubating ideas produces better thinking by way of extra time taking the mind off first impressions. As these fade away it opens the door for a different approach to a problem.

I see Guy Claxton’s idea of the creative process very similar to the incubation process where writers let themselves sleep on a problem and by the morning a solution appears.

¹⁴ Claxton, G. (1998) *Hare Brain Tortoise Mind*. London: Fourth Estate. p.61

A further view is suggested by Mike Sharples (1999, p.73), Professor of Education Technology at the University of Birmingham. He has studied the strategies and techniques that writers use in order to demystify the mental processes in the activity of writing. He sees writing as a cycle of engagement and reflection that forms the cognitive engine of writing. He looks at three core activities – planning, composing and revising. However, he sees the three as a cycle as opposed to a series of stages leading to a final product as the diagram below illustrates.

MODEL OF WRITING AS DESIGN¹⁵



The diagram, according to Mike Sharples, shows no start point and no end point to the process and writing can begin at any of the three activities and he says this is what makes writing so flexible and frustrating. He goes on to say that a session of writing can start with the writer making a plan to guide

¹⁵ Sharples, M., (1999) *How we Write*, London: Routledge. p. 72

composing, or it can begin with a session of free writing to explore ideas or it can begin with an existing text that the writer re-works for a new purpose or audience. Each of the core activities – contemplate, specify, generate, interpret – can be carried out in different ways and writers can learn techniques such as brainstorming and free-writing to support and extend them. He says it is a rather mechanistic account of the writing process. It does not capture that agony of waiting for words that refuse to flow, or the delight of conjuring up an unexpected, novel idea.

An example of using different approaches to writing can be seen in a Ray Bradbury interview in the Paris Review in 2010:

I never write an outline. It's just like you can't plot tomorrow or next year or ten years from now. When you plot books you take all the energy and vitality out. There's no blood. You have to live it from day to day and let your characters do things. (The Art of Fiction. No. 203)

Here the author describes how his writing does not have any particular plotting scheme for his novels. He follows Mike Sharple's idea that writing can start at any point.

I agree with Mike Sharples that writing can and does start in alternative ways for different writers. Each writer is an individual and has to find a way that suits them and their writing. His idea of the creative process is more flexible and does not stick rigidly with phases along the way. Although I had pre-planned *Carrington's* I found that I often moved about with my writing ideas as the mood took me. Often I would stop writing and try and generate new ideas for future chapters. I'd make notes as I went along to return to a previous chapter that I had previously thought I'd completed. One example is the original storyline of Toby and Patrick's cruel bet over whether one of them could get Margaret into

bed. As the story progressed I discussed this with my supervisor and realised the idea was not working. I went back through the previous chapters and altered the storyline to Patrick meeting up with Margaret by chance at the cinema and taking her home where they both got drunk and ended up sleeping together.

What my research has led me to believe is that writers are all individuals and use their creative processes in accordance with their own particular habits. This is not to say that they stick rigidly to a plan and some of their processes do indeed mirror the ideas of Wallis, Petty, Robinson, Doyle, Claxton, and Sharples.

Interviewing published authors about their processes was very beneficial. The interviews, because they were conducted very much on a friendly and informal basis, allowed me to enter their world and draw out information that would not have been possible from a written article. For example, interviewee Dr Clare Dudman (2013, pp 403/4) suggests that her writing approach to each of her novels differs due to the different topics she chooses. Sometimes a character comes to her in an unexpected way. On one occasion she observed a man serving in Marks and Spencer. After watching his facial expressions and body language she thought he'd make an excellent character for one of her books. This would correspond with all four expert views - Graham Wallas's model of preparation, incubation, and illumination; Sir Ken Robinson's view that creativity occurs in intuitive leaps because it draws from areas of the mind that are not regulated by rational thought, Guy Claxton's thought incubation, and Mike Sharple's compose activity.

Interviewee Priscilla Masters (2011, p. 440) suggests that her work in a psychiatric hospital and the real life drama and patients therein brings many ideas for her novels. One day a group of nurses were talking about a fire in a

mental home that resulted in multiple deaths. This she describes as the ‘seed’ and all it needed was a little water and fertiliser. The idea, she says, was put in a notebook for more research. This situation again falls into the views of the three experts – the model of preparation, incubation, and illumination by Graham Wallas, Sir Ken Robinson’s view that creativity occurs in intuitive leaps because it draws from areas of the mind that are not regulated by rational thought, and Mike Sharple’s ‘compose and plan’ activities.

When I interviewed author Helen Sea I asked her how long the process of mapping out the details of her novel takes. She answered:

It can take several months. What I do is try and write simultaneously so that other ideas are added in as I go along. And I also have at one point changed the whole premise of the book during that period. (p.357)

Here the author is adopting Mike Sharple’s idea that writing can start at any point. By writing simultaneously she is mixing planning with engaged writing.

When I interviewed the author Alison Leonard (2013) I asked her how she planned her writing. She told me about her book *Tinker’s Career*:

I remember the family. There were these two little girls and I got very attached to one of them. Then I left the area and lost contact with them and all that sort of thing. But this was churning away at the back of my mind because one morning when I’d had things published and I was feeling that I was actually a writer I woke up and I had the title which is a pun on the name of the illness Huntington’s Chorea. (p. 414)

Here the writer is using the Graham Wallas model of incubation and illumination, and Sir Ken Robinson's view of creativity occurring in intuitive leaps.

All the authors I interviewed have their own individual processes for writing their novels.

Conclusion

The writing of a novel is a massive undertaking which in some cases can take years to complete. At the start of my project my objective was to carry out research to explore the question of whether the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity. To hopefully reach an answer I researched numerous areas to see how authors make the journey from an initial idea to their final draft.

I first looked at the make-up of the human brain with its two hemispheres. The left is associated with verbal, logical and analytical thinking. The right excels in visual, spatial, perceptual and intuitive information. I discovered that writers of fiction have to move back and forth between these two worlds. I explored restricted planning in the annual National Novel Writing Month competition where entrants are invited to write an on-line 50,000 word novel in the month of November. The point of the exercise is to get people writing. There have been a few success stories and fifteen writers have been published. I looked at what happens in the brain when creativity disappears due to writer's block. Then moved onto the education system where I discovered pre-planned school curriculums with fixed timetables have discouraged right brain creativity in children.

My research then moved on to the planning processes of brain storming, mind mapping and the Snowflake Method. Finally I moved on to the creative processes of Graham Wallas, Geoffrey Petty, Sir Ken Robinson, Charlotte Doyle, Guy Claxton and Mike Sharples.

At this stage I have to ask how effective was my study design? The way I approached my project was mixed and had many surprises. I see myself as a fairly organised person and having spent my working life as a secretary/PA I was certainly used to organising other people who ranged from the well organised to the totally chaotic. The secretarial work would, I thought, stand me in good stead for a large project. But the PhD was a lot bigger than I had imagined.

My first problem was mixing the two areas of novel writing and research. One thing I started to do early on in the process was to try and compartmentalise the work. I would concentrate on writing my novel for a period of time and then switch to the research. This idea worked in theory but, I have to admit, I was forever in my mind switching between the two areas. While writing the novel I would often search for articles, journals and books on the subjects of creativity and planning and download any material for a later date. So it actually did prove difficult not to mix the two areas.

I found it useful to set myself deadlines for completing either a novel chapter or for exploring and writing up an area of research. However, these deadlines did not always work out. I would often find that the writing of a chapter took longer than I'd anticipated so I would go over my time limit. And on the other hand I'd often discover something new and interesting on creativity and planning that I wanted to follow up immediately and this would involve further work in searching for more material on the subject. Time was also taken

up with attending PhD courses run by the MMU Research, Enterprise and Development office, visits to libraries and reading books and journals. The monthly tutorials with my tutor were a good opportunity to ask questions, raise any difficulties, go over marked work and generally discuss the progress of my coursework. There were also monthly PhD student workshops that proved extremely beneficial. The other students became my audience and I was grateful for their comments on my novel.

The first month of my course was spent setting out my novel with the pre-planning Snowflake Method. Once this was completed I felt it would be a good idea to work on one piece of research at a time. This worked fairly well – but there were several occasions when looking for one piece of research I found another area that was interesting and knew it would be vital to include it. However one idea for research came quite by chance. I was struggling with the third chapter of my novel and found it difficult to move on. Eventually I realised that I was suffering from writer's block. I was able to get over this because I use an intercutting style whereby each of my chapters are made up of three, four or five separate scenes and characters. This enabled me to leave a gap and move onto the next chapter and as I saw how the next chapter and storyline was developing I was able to gain a better understanding of the character I'd previously been stuck on and was then able to move on. However, this experience made me realise that creativity can and does dry up at various times and so I explored the area of writer's block and added it to my research chapter.

So what have I learnt from my study design? The most important thing is to be organised. And it is important to keep an open mind and not create tunnel vision for oneself. A PhD is a very big project and at times it feels like keeping

numerous balls in the air. My planning and organisation did stand me in good stead. Physically I organised myself with files, mind-maps, notebooks, and deadlines. But I had to learn to be emotionally organised and flexible to new things. I was to discover that there would be days and even weeks when the writing would just not come. I had to learn to free my mind and create new ideas under the pressure of such a large project.

So did my research bring the results I expected? The answer has to be yes and no. There were many surprises along the way. One was to learn how different writers can be in the way they plan their novels. This was discovered from the interviews I carried out with published authors, questionnaires I circulated, reading articles about writers and attending literature festivals. For example at the Buxton Literature Festival (2007) I asked the author Joanna Trollope to describe her working day. She stated that she starts her day at 9am and finishes at 1pm. Her feeling is that after four hours the mind has done all it can in that time. At the other end of the scale the author Jeffrey Archer works in shifts of two hours on and two hours off throughout his working day.

Another area of research that surprised me was how Tony Buzan has taken mind-mapping to another level. Not only is there software available that can be useful for seeing the fuller picture and business presentations, but he has entered the area of education where he believes left brain dominance in teaching makes creativity take a lower priority. I did not, until researching mind-mapping, realise that education was creating this problem and is the reason why a lot of pupils like Richard Branson and Bill Gates did not do well at school yet went on to have very successful careers.

So what have I learned from my experience of this project? I have learned that pre-planning is essential. No area of planning is wasted. It is far better to have too many plans than none at all. The skeleton is the basis on which I produce my novels. I've learned as I've progressed that the skeleton has to be very flexible to allow for ideas that come along after the writing has started. I have learned that it is possible to be creative within a framework whether it be the regulations applied to a PhD, the requirements of an audio publisher, the format of a kindle edition, a word count, or a deadline. I have also learnt to be self-disciplined – a PhD can be a solitary experience and by learning to set my own timetables it will, hopefully, help me when writing future novels. Creativity is ongoing and I feel no planning or restrictions can curb it. All the time I am incubating ideas – they may, like Alison Leonard's book *Tinker's Career*, take twenty years to surface but they are always kept in the mind. I have learned that people become writers for various reasons – needing to tell a story, wanting to express themselves through a character, the need to leave something behind when they die, or wanting to prove they can indeed write.

My objective when starting this project was to research whether pre-planning stifles creativity. My research explored the physiology of the human brain, the planning methods of brain storming, mind-mapping, and the Snowflake method. I then looked at the annual NaNoWriMo competition that requires no pre-planning. I moved on to how the education system and IQ tests favour left brained dominance, I looked at the creative processes researched by Graham Wallas, Sir Ken Robinson, Geoffrey Petty, Guy Claxton, and Mike Sharples. I also explored writer's block and the drying up of creativity. Finally the interviews I conducted with published writers gave me an insight into the

way many authors plan and create their books. I have concluded from my research into all these areas that pre-planning does not stifle creativity. It is in fact an aid to an author to create a skeleton of their novel from which to work. This skeleton is flexible and will bend as the author progresses with their story. As the writer plans they are creating ideas. The planning *is* creativity.

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CHAPTER 2

THE WRITING OF CARRINGTON'S

The writing of *Carrington's* was a voyage of discovery from conception to first draft. The journey often strayed from the planned route, taking B roads, country lanes and cul-de-sacs along the way, as characters evolved and new ideas formed. This chapter will cover the writing of my novel: how it was researched, how it was put together, how other authors and Creative Writing craft books have influenced me, and what the experience taught me.

A theme can be present in a novel but is not always obvious. It can be a deeper layer of meaning running beneath the surface. The theme running through *Carrington's* is mid-life. This age group may face many crossroads. It can be a time of challenge, turning points, reflection, and regret – both physical and emotional. My research into mid-life uncovered some interesting new material which was to give me a better insight into the events and changes that I was to take my characters through in the writing of my novel.

Cosgrave and Moynihan (1995, pp 210-219) argue that up until recently there has been the popular belief that there are only two main stages or phases in human life – youth and adulthood. It was believed that youth lasted till about twenty and was characterised by growth and change. This was followed by the long years of adulthood – often viewed as a plateau that had no awareness that there might be major psychological or spiritual changes within it or specific phases of widely varying types. Cosgrave and Moynihan address the point that

Jung said that youth is the time for developing one's ego and consciousness as a response to the expectations of society. Mid-life, he said, is a time to move inward as we grow and adapt in our inner self and life. This is the mid-life transition in which the whole personality flowers and re-orders its values.

This research proved useful in creating situations for two of my characters. Firstly, Helen Patterson, having spent until her late forties being a good company wife, blossoms when she returns to work. Secondly, Margaret Haddock is released from her carer situation and adapts to her inner self by changing her life by leaving her job and heading for the sun.

However, many experts suggest that there is no such thing as a transition or any crisis at mid-life. According to Dr David Almeida (2008, p6) 'mid-life crisis is indeed largely a myth. The problems tend to be brought on by a major life transition, not necessarily by age alone. Stressful things happen in mid-life such as chronic health problems, loss of loved ones, especially parents – and people start to recognise that their time on earth is limited.'

This research helped me create two life-changing situations for William Patterson. Firstly he has a health scare with chest pains. Secondly he is under threat of redundancy with the takeover of Carrington's by Rightways. He suddenly becomes aware that his days may be numbered if he has heart problems. And at the age of fifty two he may end up on the job market scrap heap. The following excerpt shows the moment John Gray delivers the first rumour of the takeover:

Bit of news on the grapevine. And this is strictly
Between the two of us. There's a meeting at Head
Office tomorrow. Talk about some stores closing
(p.28)

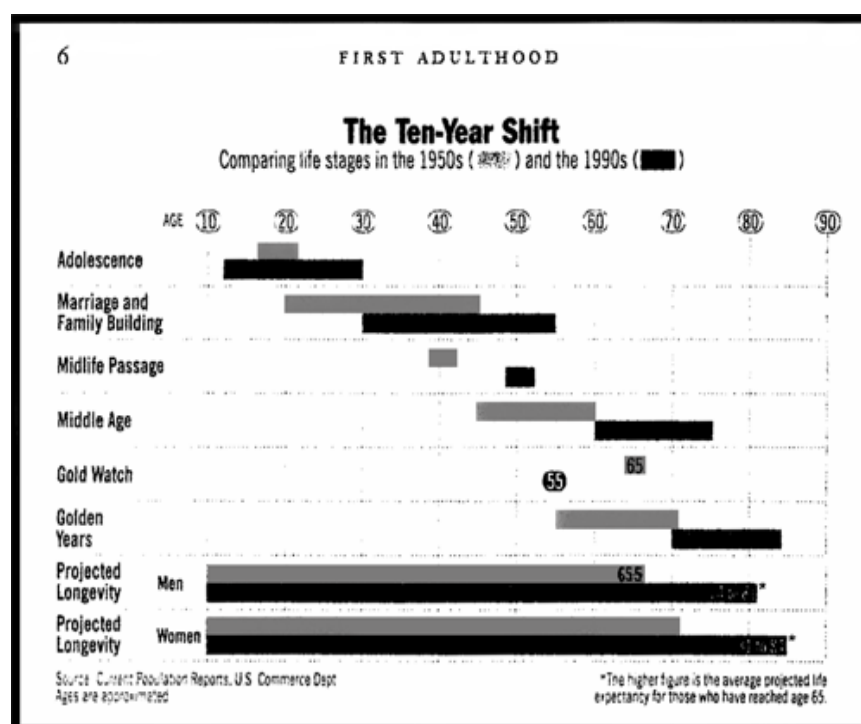
William's world starts to crumble as the sudden realisation that he may be made redundant. In an article written by Clare West (2011, p.1), Charity Director of Age UK, interviewee Michelle Mitchell states that as 2011 unfolds, hundreds of thousands of older workers are facing job cuts and rising inflation, with the risk of long-term unemployment looming. Long-term unemployment after fifty is a devastating way to end a working life.

William is shocked because redundancy in his early fifties is not something he ever envisaged. At this stage it was my intention to bring in other worries that would change his controlled life to one of great uncertainty. William now had health problems and redundancy to worry about. I added more to William's worries by introducing the manipulating Celia Langridge. With Helen away she has the opportunity to get closer to William.

So William Patterson, at fifty two, finds his life going through a transition. But new research suggests that mid-life has shifted in age and there is a new version of what mid-life now means within the modern world. Gail Sheehy (1996, pp 3-5) suggests 'Western culture from antiquity to the present has sought to divide human life into ages and stages – and from the beginning of the last century to the 1970s the marker events of life – graduation, first job, marriage, first child, empty nest, retirement, widowhood, even death – always tended to occur for most people at predictable points in life.' Since the publication of her first book *Passages* in 1976, age norms have shifted and are no longer normative. She goes on to say this is demonstrated in nine year old girls developing breasts and starting menstruation, many thirty year old men still living with their parents, women of over forty starting to have babies, numerous men in their early fifties forced into early retirement, hip replacements for ninety

year olds, and more people reaching the age of one hundred. Now in one generation the cycle of life has shifted. Looking at the demographics today, Sheehy says that children are leaving childhood sooner but are taking longer to grow up. And even longer to grow old. These changes mean that the stages of adulthood are shifted ahead by up to ten years. The chart below shows this in detail.

The Ten Year Shift¹⁶



The grey areas on the chart show how life stages looked in the 1950s. The black areas represent life stages in the 1990s. The comparisons display the ten-year shift that has occurred. This suggests that the ages of the fifties, sixties, and beyond is radically changing and is leading to stages of life that are nothing like our parents or grandparents ever experienced. It could be said that fifty is now what forty used to be. Sixty is what fifty used to be.

¹⁶ Sheehy, G. (1996) *New Passages*. Hammersmith: HarperCollins P. 6

My research into the ten year shift has enabled me to display some of my characters acting in a way younger than their years and different to their forebears. An example can be seen as Margaret Haddock approaches a milestone birthday.

Where had, she wondered, all those dreams gone.
Soon to be forty and none of the items on her wish list
had been crossed off. (p.67)

In this extract Margaret reflects on lost opportunities. But Gail Sheehy's research on the ten-year shift allowed me to abandon my original plans to leave this character with a bleak future. Instead I was able to re-invent her as an independent woman making her own life choices. She heads for the sun and forms a relationship with Pablo. In comparison her mother being from an earlier generation would not have had this opportunity.

Journalist Neil Tweedie (2012 p.24) agrees with Gail Sheehy's findings. His opinion is. 'Nowadays we do everything later. As we live longer, humanity is increasingly refusing to sit back, put its feet up and settle for a quiet old age.'

Nowhere is this phenomenon aping youth more noticeably than in the field of divorce. The Divorce Reform Act of 1971, according to the BBC News UK (2001), made it much easier for a couple to escape marriage. Apart from variations in Scotland, the Act still forms the basis of Britain's divorce laws today. The Act created the so-called 'quickie divorce' and introduced the principle of 'irretrievable breakdown' as grounds for separation.'

I was not able to use the 1971 act for my character Helen Patterson. Trapped in a claustrophobic marriage with a manipulating husband, she is able to

file for divorce on the grounds of William's adultery and start a new life for herself. In the following excerpt she reflects on the decision she made to her friend Judy:

The thing is William and I just outgrew each other. I really don't know if marriage has a shelf life. All I do know for definite is that I couldn't go on pretending any longer. (p.246)

According to Alix Kirsta (1987 p.27) health and survival are based on the body's ability to maintain a balance of all the physical and mental processes. She warns that too much change in our lives can overtax our adaptive resources causing illnesses. She also states that the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, devised by the American doctors T H Holmes and R H Rahe, cites forty one positive and negative life events valued according to the amount of adjustment needed to cope with them.

The Holmes Rahe Scale¹⁷

Life event	Life change units
Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Imprisonment	63
Death of close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Dismissal from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40

¹⁷ Kirsta, A, The Holmes Rahe Scale. *The Book of Stress Survival* London: Gaia Books p.27

Sexual difficulties	39
Gain of new family member	39
Business re-adjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Major mortgage	32
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse begins or stops work	26
Begin or end school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Minor mortgage or loan	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family reunions	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violation of the law	11

A score of over 300 points in one year can greatly increase the risk of illness. But illness is not an inevitable result of change. The personality and ability to cope determine how well a person reacts. William, being an ‘A’ type personality and perfectionist, needing to be in control is put under great pressure by the changes in his life. From the above chart he scores 406 points with:

Marital separation	65
Subsequent divorce	47
Business re-adjustment	39
Change in number of rows with spouse	35
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Spouse begins or stops work	26
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours	20
Change in residence	20

Total:	406

The score of 406 takes place over a year and William’s stress levels by these events are put on high risk. He is no longer able to balance physical and emotional processes. He is experiencing shortness of temper, outbursts of verbal abuse, and inability to handle Helen’s insistence on returning to work. His position of being in control is severely challenged. My intention at this point was to introduce the reader to a man on the edge. Would he change his ways or continue on the same road?

However, characters can and do often surprise the reader. They don’t always follow the path expected. At the end of the novel William has achieved his goal of being promoted to Area Manager. Shortly after moving to Lancaster he attends a party at the home of his neighbour Lorna.

She would never be as attractive as Helen and was a stone or two overweight. But she had an easy going manner and as far as he knew had no hang ups. And at the end of the day she'd make an excellent company wife. (p.253)

Here my intention was to show that William, despite his wife leaving him and his mistress betraying his trust, has changed very little. He has reverted back to his old ways of a controlling workaholic.

However, a crisis may not be just for the fifties age group. According to Clare Tyler (2010, p.1), Chief Executive of the relationship advice charity Relate, a survey found mid-life crisis begins in the mid-30s. This is believed to be due to work and relationship pressures. It can make the mid-30s the start of many British people's unhappiest decade. Of the 2,000 people interviewed by Relate, more people aged 35-44 said that they felt lonely or depressed than in any other age group. Relate said it revealed a "true mid-life crisis."

An example of this can be seen in my character Patrick. In his thirties he is experiencing an early mid-life crisis. As head of menswear he resents the long hours he is expected to work which leaves him very little free time. To combat this unhappy stage in his life he turns to gambling for excitement – but this only gives him a temporary fix as his gambling has led him into debt. His frustrations show in the following excerpt:

Every Tom, Dick and bloody Harry that didn't have to work on a Sunday would descend on the store. In Menswear he'd be inundated with customers and their irritating questions. (p.24)

Here I try to expose Patrick's miserable life. He hates his job and his life is consumed with the same old routine. Coming up to forty he has not yet been

able to form a loving and meaningful relationship. He is in what the Relate survey suggests is his unhappiest decade.

What I've learnt from the above research is that arguments exist over whether there truly is such a thing as a mid-life transition. Gail Sheehy (1996, p.5) has pointed out many social roles and development tasks formerly associated with one stage have been postponed to another or ignored altogether. The sequence of stages has been altered by new choices in technologies and pushing the boundaries of biology and longevity. These changes have made many interesting situations possible for my characters. An example of such choices can be seen in Helen Patterson's ambition to take up training in a legal career in her late forties. This move would have been unheard of years ago when careers were established at a younger age and many people stayed in the same profession for life. And these changes that have occurred in the modern world have enabled me to take my characters on many different routes that their parents and grandparents could never have chosen. A further example can be seen in William Patterson who, at the age of 52, faces the prospect of redundancy from a well-paid job that he had expected to spend his whole life doing. But in the present climate many people face this prospect and often have to change careers at a late stage or, in some cases, never work again. Mid-life in a world of new and ever increasing technology and changing attitudes to growing older, mean new opportunities arise that push the boundaries of traditional ideas and create new problems. These new problems I have been able to introduce in my characters.

Characters

Characters in novels are an important part of a story. My intention has been to produce characters going through the complexities of mid-life and to demonstrate how these problems and changes of direction can create tension and drama. The department store is used as a backdrop and although the daily running of the store is involved the novel concentrates heavily on the lives of the characters.

I tend to see my characters in visual terms. My intention in doing this is to keep their appearance in the forefront of my memory. Early in the pre-planning stage I build a collection of photographs of characters. This helps twofold. Firstly, having established what my characters look like, I feel able to invent their personality and story line. Secondly, having character photographs keeps them fresh in my mind throughout the writing process.

My characters are formed from a combination of people I've known throughout my life – friends, family, teachers, and colleagues. Also I get a lot of material from observing people. So often a look, body language, clothes, and voice can help to put together an interesting and often eccentric character.

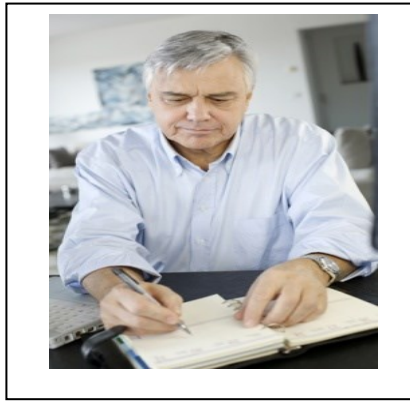
Author Kendall Haven (1999, p.16) believes characters, very similar to humans, are made of concentric layers – background history, religious and political beliefs, experiences and interpretations. He adds that layer stacked upon layer – like the layers of an onion – creates a character. It is the combination of the layer rather than any particular layer, which creates a compact and believable character.

This is never truer than in the creation of my character Celia Langridge. When she is first introduced she is a bitter middle aged woman still reeling from being dumped by her ex-husband for a younger model. For someone like Celia, who is vain and obsessed with her looks, this is the ultimate put down. Her life is now dominated by returning items to shops, and resentment of happily married couples.

On researching marriage and divorce I came across Naomi Gerstal of the University of Amherst (1980 pp 343-367) who states ‘marriage brings entry into social circles. In turn divorce dissolves not only marriage but relationships surrounding it.’ She adds that as a result, the divorced often find themselves outsiders to the social worlds they inhabited while married. This information helped me form the personality of Celia as the bitter divorcee. My aim was to shape her into a very unhappy woman resentful of her newly acquired single status. For her, many positive points of her married life such as companionship, wealth, and social standing, have disappeared. I created her as a bitter and manipulating woman. Her sole purpose in life now is to find another rich husband.

William Patterson, the fifty-two year old manager of Carrington’s is a workaholic by nature.

William Patterson¹⁸



In his climb up the career ladder he has hurt others, none more so than his long suffering wife Helen. He has grown used to having his own way at work and at home. This side to his character can be seen in the following quote from chapter one.

The door opened. Helen put a cup of coffee on the silver coaster on the desk. He nodded but didn't look up. She closed the door quietly on her way out knowing, after twenty five years of marriage, not to interrupt his train of thought. (p. 9)

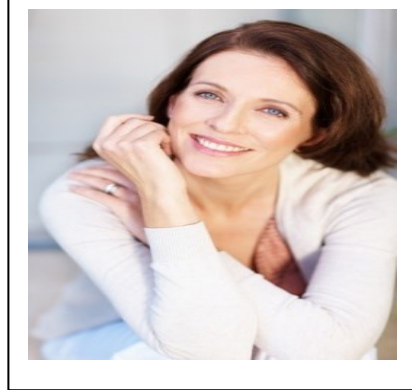
My purpose in creating this scene was to show William's sense of control within his marriage. It would hopefully lay down the foundations in readiness for the many changes that would be presented - such as Helen's return to work, the break-up of his marriage, and humiliation by his mistress Celia.

Characters evolve over time. A character starts out as a certain person the author has created. However, as the story progresses the character becomes better known to the writer. This can cause the writer to stop and re-think whether their character would now act in different ways.

¹⁸ Photograph of William Patterson. Shutterstock.com Number 118954486 purchased on 18 January 2013

The evolution of a character can also be seen in Helen Patterson.

Helen Patterson¹⁹



At the start of my novel I created her as a long suffering wife. This can be seen in the following scene from chapter one. Here William refers to Helen in his speech at their twenty fifth wedding anniversary party.

I'd like to say a very special thank you to my wife for her loyalty. He paused while there was a round of applause. As you know being a company wife takes a lot of hard work. She has been there night and day for me. (p.11)

Here Helen is portrayed as a dutiful company wife. But under the surface is the frustration of lack of identity from the empty nest since daughter Catherine left home.

There are, however, hints given about plans in store to rectify her frustration in a conversation with her best friend Verity.

Verity looked at Helen. 'You've not told him have you?'
'No,' she replied. 'I couldn't face a scene before the party.'

¹⁹ Photograph of Helen Patterson. Shutterstock.com. Number 40454218. Purchased 18 January 2013

‘So you’ll tell him tonight then?’ A frown crossed her face making deep lines on her forehead. ‘Yes. He won’t like it. But it’s not as if we have anything planned.’ (p. 12)

I purposely held back the moment Helen tells William she has a job until the end of chapter one. My purpose in doing this was to hopefully increase tension for the reader. They have already been told that William has planned a surprise holiday to Tenerife but Helen won’t be able to go due to work commitments. The timing of this event means that the first chapter ends with a huge argument between the couple. It is from this moment that the problems start to spiral out of control.

As the novel progresses Helen evolves into a much stronger character. When she finds out about William’s affair she stands her ground and refuses to be brow beaten by William any longer.

She moved back to the table and sank in a chair.
You’re pathetic do you know that? Bloody pathetic.
You couldn’t stand the fact that I’d taken a job and
at the first opportunity turned to the first woman that
flattered you. (p. 227)

To allow for this evolving of my character I had to adjust my original plans. I had previously thought that Helen, together with her new career, would persuade William that they had a future together. However, as Helen increased in strength and eventually found out about William’s affair with Celia, I re-drafted the story to see Helen leaving her marriage and starting up a new life alone.

A character can become familiar to the reader through humour. Staff canteen cook Margaret Haddock creates amusement with her tactless remarks, appearance, and lively personality.

We first meet her at the silver wedding party. She is seated next to Toby Benson who is finding her company tiresome.

Her orange hair, the latest in a variety of colours she'd adorned, was kept in check by a tight perm and lacquered, he thought, to within an inch of its life. He wondered at what stage she'd given up on her appearance. He couldn't imagine her ever being young. However, staff records told him she was only thirty nine. But, even on a good day, she looked fifty five. (p. 13)

By describing Margaret's appearance my aim was to introduce this lady as a larger than life character. I based her on a cook that worked in the store where my father worked. She was short, plump, and fiery. Yet underneath the loud exterior she had a heart of gold. The name Haddock seemed appropriate. I had the idea from a friend who after her marriage became Mrs Cod. This caused great amusement wherever she went. The same can be said of the name Haddock. So I purposely chose a name that readers would remember and would conjure up an amusing character.

My purpose in creating this early scene with Toby was to present a picture of Margaret as a loud and tactless woman. However, in later chapters I introduce the reader to her home life where she is carer to her ungrateful mother. Here I expose her sad and lonely existence where her only friend is alcohol. This brought depth to the character and would keep readers guessing as to her

outcome as the story progressed. Would she escape from her mother? Would she find romance?

A character does not necessarily have to be liked. I created Reg Perkins as a security guard who conducts his life in military style but has a dark secret. The following extract shows the air of authority he likes to exude.

Reg Perkins, stood out from the crowd with his six foot three frame. The low parting in his grey hair did little to disguise his bald head, as he waited for the green man to appear before crossing. Even in mufti he adopted the security man pose – his erect figure looking both ways before guiding the small crowd of people around him across the road. (p. 47)

This excerpt creates Reg taking control at a zebra crossing. My aim was to introduce him as a man whose outer layer of precision and efficiency hides a very dark inner layer. I decided to use the tactic of releasing information about Reg slowly. The extract below is the first hint of another side to him.

In the security office Reg studied the picture of the naked girl in his locker. She was draped across a sofa in a seductive pose. Her skin was tanned and her large firm breasts were exposed for him to admire. She had, he thought, a look of freedom about her. But, he knew, she was a bad girl who needed punishing. (p. 48)

This passage displays Reg's liking for naked girls. However, this is only the beginning of exposing a much darker side to his personality. As the story progresses we see the display of photographs on his spare bedroom wall of the girls he has secretly photographed in the park. It was my intention to slowly expose him as a perverted peeping Tom and to follow his journey and eventual downfall.

Adele Ramet (2010 p.38) suggests that writers create a potted history of their characters. She says that just like real people, fictional characters don't simply appear fully-grown. They have parents, backgrounds, siblings and experiences that shape their personalities and influence their current behaviour.

Below can be seen the format she uses.

An example of Adele Ramet's character history²⁰

NAME:
AGE:
APPEARANCE: (hair, eye colour, height, weight, build etc)
MARITAL STATUS:
CURRENT HOME:
OCCUPATION:
PARENTS: (alive or dead?)
SIBLINGS: (names, ages, marital status etc)
CHILDHOOD: (happy, sad, traumatic etc)
EDUCATION:
QUALIFICATIONS:
RELATIONSHIPS: (past and present)

²⁰ Ramet, A.(2010) *Creative Writing*. 8th edn. Oxford: How to Books. P.39

PERSONALITY:
SPECIAL
SKILLS:
STRENGTHS:
WEAKNESSES:
ANY OTHER RELEVANT
INFORMATION:
.....
.....

Below is the chart for character Reg Perkins²¹

NAME:	Reg Perkins
AGE:	54
APPEARANCE:	Grey hair/beard, 6 foot 3 inches tall, 17 stone.
MARITAL STATUS:	Bachelor
CURRENT HOME:	Ground floor council flat
OCCUPATION:	Security guard at Carrington's Store (night shift)
PARENTS:	Olive and Billy Perkins (both deceased)
SIBLINGS:	Three brothers and three sisters.
CHILDHOOD:	Sad and neglected. Father left home when Reg

²¹ Bradley, D. Example of chart for *Carrington's* character Reg Perkins

	only 2 years old. Mother struggled to keep family together.
EDUCATION:	Secondary Modern.
QUALIFICATIONS:	None. Played truant.
RELATIONSHIPS:	Problems with maintaining any relationship.
PERSONALITY:	Creepy. A loner.
SPECIAL SKILLS:	Photography.
STRENGTHS:	Timekeeping.
WEAKNESSES:	Spying on young girls.
ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION	Blames his mother for not giving him enough attention. Now has no respect for females.

My intention in making this chart for Reg was to get as much information as possible about my character in order to fully understand his personality. To enter his inner world and work out why he acts in the way he does. I feel that by knowing his past such as the neglect by his mother I can then make sense of his present situation. By gaining this knowledge I hoped I was able to present a fuller and more interesting character to the reader.

To gain an even better understanding of Reg I researched the world of the peeping Tom. According to Dr Eugene Viljoen of *Health 24* (2011, p.1) ‘it is a form of perversion which involves peeping at other people who don’t know you’re watching them plus the sexual gratification stems from the secrecy of the act, and the suspicions of the victim. The peeping Tom becomes aroused and

may masturbate during the activity, or afterwards, while recalling what they have seen. Connected to this is the reading of pornography and the visiting of pornographic Internet sites.’ This information helped me to build up the character of Reg and understand his thoughts and interaction with other people. The secrecy with which Reg leads his life and his loner personality has been drawn from research by Dr Eugene Viljoen’s.

In fiction it is often thought that the protagonist is the hero and the antagonist is the villain. But, in my opinion, this labelling is not always clear cut. It was my original intention when writing *Carrington’s* to have William Patterson becoming the hero of the novel by taking an emotional journey from workaholic manager to contented retiree. However, as my writing progressed and I got to know the character really well, I decided it would make a better story to have him not learning by his mistakes at all. And despite all the odds stacked up against him with losing his wife and being humiliated by his mistress he just keeps going to achieve his own goal of promotion.

This new storyline then put the emphasis on Helen Patterson who took on a bigger part in the novel. I had originally planned for her to remain much more in the background – but again as this character grew I felt the story should be as much about her own journey as William’s. The experience taught me there does not necessarily have to be one protagonist and one antagonist. As far as their emotional journeys go the premise of determination over control comes through. And control shifts from one to the other depending on the events that befall them.

According to creative writing theorist, David Sheppard, (2009, p39) it can be preferable to refer to the protagonist as the point-of-view character. He’s

the one the narrator follows around throughout the novel. The antagonist is then the character in conflict with the protagonist. This moves us away from a moral judgement of the two main characters.

But, in some novels there appears to be on the surface no clear cut protagonist or antagonist. An example can be seen in Anita Brookner's novel *Hotel du Lac*. Romantic fiction writer, Edith Hope, banished to a quiet hotel to forget her affair with a married man, spends time with her thoughts, hotel guests, and contemplates a marriage proposal from a hotel guest she does not love. Eventually she returns to London and resumes her affair with the married man – realising that although she has to share him with another woman this man brings her true happiness. The Premise of love overcoming adversity carries the story along. From this I have learnt many novels are emotional journeys. The Premise could also be described as woman overcoming herself. On her stay at the hotel Edith weighs up the sides of the argument through her observations and conversations with hotel guests before coming to her decision to return home to England.

I have learned from character creation that many of my initial thoughts about them changed with preparation and research. Firstly, using creative writing craft theorist Randal Ingermanson's Snowflake Method, enabled me to construct a CV for each of my characters. This helped me see their past, present, and future goals. I then had a sense of where they came from, where they were at the present time, and where they wanted to go. This was a good starting point. But further research shaped my characters into the people they eventually became in the novel. For example with Naomi Gerstal's view (1980, pp 343-367) that divorced people often find themselves outside the social circles they inhabited

while married, I was able to make Celia Langridge into the bitter divorcee who resented her married friends and her only goal was to find another husband. This in turn gave me the opportunity to channel her bitterness into the habit of complaining vehemently as she returned items to the store. My research into mid-life also enabled me to shape the character of William Patterson into a middle-aged man facing marital break-up, infidelity, and change of career that can occur in the middle years. I was then able to use this material to demonstrate the knock-on effect of how these changes in William's life would affect other characters like Helen and Celia. I was, after much research, able to expand and deepen the lives of characters. It is not, in my belief, a case of only creating the appearance and personality. The character has to be taken through various situations and events on their journey. The writer has to know how the character will act. No character will be exactly like me with the same beliefs and outlook. They will have their own views and way of thinking. I therefore had to learn to inhabit the world of these characters from conception to the end of the book.

The one character who I feel is most like me is Helen Patterson. This information, in the process of character formation, gave me a good start. Helen is loyal. Yet at the same, harbours regret over not pursuing a career when younger. I was then able to put Helen through a series of situations that would challenge her decision.

Her face was flushed and her ankles noticeably swollen from walking up and down the building. She had not yet done the minutes from the staff meeting, filed the backlog correspondence, learnt how to use the new typewriter or had a cup of tea since her morning break. (p. 36)

Having been in this situation myself I believe I knew exactly the problems that Helen would be up against in a new job. And to offset this scene I was able to show the character progressing as time went on. In the next excerpt she is talking to Verity about her chance of promotion:

The upshot it he's offered me the chance
to train as a solicitor with the firm. (p. 168)

This passage shows the evolution of Helen. She has progressed from her initial PA job and been offered a studentship to train as a solicitor. This gives her a completely different point of view on her life.

Point of view

Point of view in novel writing allows authors to choose from first person, second person, third person and omniscient. First person narrative is the most personal. The reader connects directly with the character as they feel they are in a one-to-one conversation. In David Lodge's novel *Deaf Sentence* (2008) Desmond Bates reflects on the problem of his growing deafness:

Look, sorry, I haven't heard a word you've said
to me in the last ten minutes. I'm deaf, you see,
Can't hear a thing in this din. (pp 4-5)

Here the character admits the isolation in social situations with his ever increasing deafness. The downside of first person is that your vision is very limited and we only have access to one person's view throughout a book. I found when I read *Deaf Sentence* that I longed to know more about the other characters in the book such as the wife, the student, and the elderly father.

Another writer who uses first person is Hanif Kureishi in his novel *Intimacy*. Here Kureishi follows the story of male sexual restlessness and demonstrates a middle-aged man's thoughts on the night before he leaves his

wife and family. This short novel, only a hundred and fifty five pages, works well as the whole story pivots on the thoughts of the character Jay. He takes us back to past events, his regrets and then forward to his future hopes. Again, we only see other characters through Jay's eyes. But I feel it works because Jay's thoughts are so compelling that all other characters only need to be kept on the sidelines. Kureishi handles the problems of his unsettled mid-life emotions in his descriptions. An example can be seen in the following passage:

My last night with a woman I have known for ten years, a woman I know almost everything about, and want no more of. (p. 4)

This passage demonstrates the restlessness that occurs in Jay's mid-life. He feels both guilt and need for his desires. I believe these lines are best suited to the thoughts in Jay's head rather than being spoken to another character. They make good use of his private thoughts. And, in my opinion, is why the choice of first person in this book works well.

Second person view point is less common. It turns the reader into the character and can inject a sense of urgency. An example can be seen in Jay McInerney's novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (2007, p.1):

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. (Page 1)

This passage demonstrating second person can, by its unusual approach, make a reader feel totally involved in the story. And, in a sense, it can create an opportunity for the author to disguise himself and also his own opinions through

a fictional character. The disadvantage, I feel, is the reader sees all the other characters through the eyes of one person.

Omniscient viewpoint is an extension of the third person viewpoint. This is where the narrator has a god's-eye view and dips in and out of as many characters' lives in as much detail as they wish. The author can also allow action to be suspended in order to comment and evaluate events making them an *intrusive* narrator. This can create unlimited variations but many authors stick to the limited omniscient narration and just what some characters may know and feel.

An advantage of writing from the omniscient position is an author uses third person to relate the story from a single major or minor character's point of view. However, a disadvantage is that it is the least intimate. If the author chooses this point of view they will prevent any close focus on a character and subsequently the reader will be viewing the story from afar rather than becoming emotionally involved.

In the writing of *Carrington's* I decided to use multiple viewpoint in limited third person. I rejected the idea of first person, as I wanted to give weight to the other characters. It was my aim for my characters to have a strong impact on the reader. This would have been lost if they had only been seen through William's eyes.

In third-person narration the viewpoint will change less often and this will normally occur at a chapter break or possibly a scene-break. During the time when we are with one character, we can only be aware of what is going on inside that character's mind. In *Carrington's* I chose multiple scene breaks within chapters by using an intercutting style to change viewpoint.

I did not consider second person as not only is this a very difficult view to achieve but would, I feel, have downgraded the other interesting characters I had created to smaller and insignificant parts. My intention was to allow the reader to enter the heads of all the characters. For this I concentrated on the point of view of only one character at a time.

I also wanted to make my characters very different to each other. I gave each character original and distinct traits. Examples can be seen in Margaret Haddock who is loud, overweight and tactless. Celia Langridge who is elegant but manipulating. And John Gray who dresses immaculately but has a smug and sarcastic personality.

Another reason I chose this point of view is I wanted the reader to learn what drives each of my characters to act in the way they do. For example being neglected as a child drove Reg Perkins to have no respect for women. William's career ambition was responsible for his marriage break up.

I also feel that the point of view I chose alleviated the boredom of relying on the point of view of one person throughout the entire story.

It was my aim to demonstrate that as each character in my novel goes through their own mid-life challenges the reader can feel and identify with them. An example can be seen in Reg Perkins.

In the security office Reg studied the picture of the Naked girl in his locker. She was draped across a sofa in a seductive pose. Her skin was tanned and her large firm breasts were exposed for him to admire . . . but, he knew, she was a bad girl who needed punishing. (p. 48)

The reader later learns that Reg was kept away from other children as a child by his dominant mother.

This point of view, I feel, can allow the reader to get inside the thoughts of Reg and understand, because of his neglected upbringing, he has become a loner and obsessed with young girls.

What I have learned from my research into points of view is that the approaches we take hopefully help us to shape our writing into better novels. I learnt that with unlimited third person I was able to switch point of view to another character in a following scene. This suited my novel *Carrington's* as firstly I had created what I hoped were a group of mixed and interesting characters. Secondly, with choosing a theme of mid-life, I hopefully had invented several 'age related' events for these characters to explore. I therefore felt it was crucial to let these characters have their own point of view and share these personal experiences with the reader within the setting of the novel.

Setting

The setting for *Carrington's* is a fictional town in the North West of England. This area, familiar to me, consists of many large towns and small villages on the edge of open countryside. The choice of settings allowed me to switch between the city centre location of Carrington's store and the smaller suburbs where many characters live. I spent some time researching the world of the department store. I had a previous background of the workings of a chain store in the 1950s and 1960s when my father worked at a Marks and Spencer store. This gave me the opportunity to observe the comings and goings of staff and customers. At that time the manager had numerous staff beneath him. There would be an

assistant manager, manageress, floorwalkers, and also counter, stockroom, and canteen workers. The manager would be responsible for ordering food stock, usually from local suppliers. But, in the twenty-first century, store management has changed. Much of the workforce is now made up of part-time staff. Opening hours are longer. Managers now have stock supplied from regional areas. To familiarise myself with the changes I visited many department stores in the North West such as Debenhams at the Trafford Centre, Lewis' in Cheadle, Browns of Chester (who still trade under the name of Browns of Chester but are part of the Debenhams group), and the smaller department stores of Bratts based in Northwich and Nantwich.

On a trip to London I researched the appearance and layouts of several large department stores. The point of the exercise was to give me the feel of the places and to help me decide on the size of store I wanted my novel set in. My first call was to Harrods.

Harrods Store, 87-135 Brompton Road, London²²



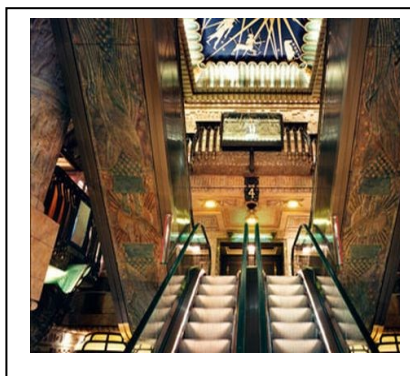
Situated in Knightsbridge this store, by its very size, offers shoppers the opportunity to spend the whole day in the one shop. The light and airy atmosphere in the foyer, the tempting display of fresh items such as lobster,

²² Harrods store (exterior).

https://www.google.com/search?q=harrods&source=12724CAAQ&ved=OCAKQ_AuoAQ&biw=10938&bih=538

meat, and fruit in the food hall, and numerous departments and restaurants on upper floors is a big crowd puller. However, on taking the escalator to the first floor I found the dark wooden panelling oppressive and the interlinking departments created a confusing layout.

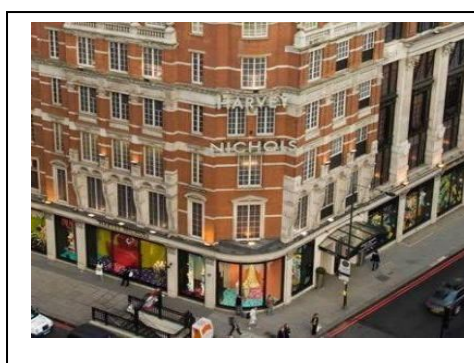
Harrods store (interior)²³



This was nothing like I imagined Carrington's to be. I wanted Carrington's to exude light and have a more intimate and friendly atmosphere.

The next stop was at Harvey Nicols in Sloane Street.

Harvey Nicols Store, Sloane Street, London²⁴



²³ Harrods store (interior).

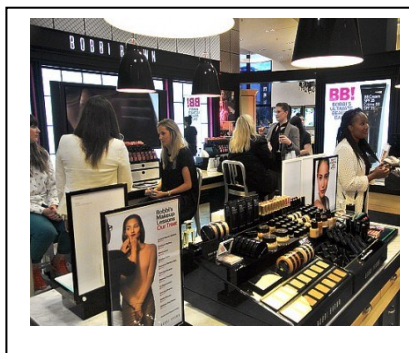
https://www.google.com/search?q=harrods&source=12724CAAQ&ved=OCAKQ_AuoAQ&biw=10938&bih=538

²⁴ Harvey Nichols Store (exterior).

https://www.google.com/Search?q=Harvey+nichols+pr40DivAg&ved=dcAK0_AUoAQ&biw=1093&bih=538

It had a light appearance as large glass doors welcomed customers. However, the space on the ground floor was not well utilised – the closeness of the counters made the atmosphere, especially when crowded with customers, very claustrophobic.

Harvey Nicols Store (interior)²⁵



Again, this atmosphere was too oppressive for what I had in mind for Carrington's. I wanted clean open spaces with plenty of good lighting.

My third and final stop was at the Peter Jones's store (now Debenhams) situated on the corner of Sloane Square and the King's Road. In contrast to the two previous stores I found the interior of the building full of light and spacious due to the use of open plan departments. The additional use of glass and chrome

Escalator at Peter Jones Store, Sloan Square London,
leading to the rooftop restaurant²⁶

²⁵ Harvey Nichols Store (interior).

https://www.google.com/Search?q=Harvey+nichols+pr40DivAg&ved=dcAK0_AUoAQ&biw=1093&bih=538



fittings add a level of sophistication. The most impressive feature was the central escalator.

This escalator travelled to the rooftop restaurant where there were views over Chelsea and Kensington. I had, I realised, found the type of store I wanted Carrington's to be. The central escalator and the use of glass and chrome would now be used in Carrington's.

The store reminded me of Bloomingdales in New York.

Bloomingdales Store, New York²⁷



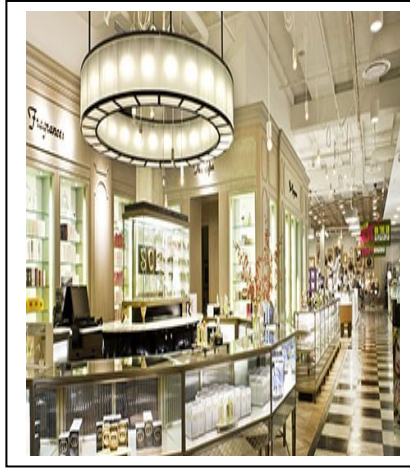
²⁶ Photograph of Peter Jones' Store, Kings Road, London.

<http://www.google.com/search?q=peter+jones+store~q=peter+jones+store+escalator>

²⁷ Photograph of Bloomingdales Store, New York. http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction-Review_g6076views-Bloomingdale_s-New_York_City_New_York.htm

The interior of the store was designed in glass and chrome and had a light and airy feel.

Interior view of Bloomingdales Store, New York²⁸



It was of course a very large store but the design, similar to that of Peter Jones', was very favourable to the eye. One particular feature was lights hanging from the high ceilings. This idea was replicated in Carrington's – the difference being that I changed them to crystal chandeliers to add brightness and luxury.

I then visited Macy's on the same New York trip.

Macy's Store, New York²⁹



²⁸ Photograph of Bloomingdales Store, New York. http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction-Review_g6076views-Bloomingdale_s-New_York_City_New_York.htm

²⁹ Photograph of Macy's Store, New York.
https://www.google.com/search/q=Macy's+Store+oKqb&ved=OCAkQ_AUoAQ&biw=1093&bih=538

Interior view of Macy's Store, New York³⁰



The interior of the store on that Saturday afternoon was untidy and throngs of shoppers were pushing and shoving to get to the counters. The impression I got was that the takings were more important than the appearance of the store. It had made its reputation selling goods at cheaper prices than its competitors. It was on this visit that the seed was sown for the idea of Carrington's being taken over by the American company Rightways. Two stores could not be more different.

Store manager, William Patterson, would at first find it hard to adjust to Rightways with its Buffalo logo and a pile it high and sell it cheap philosophy. From this research I felt it would be a good opportunity to add impact and drama by having William visit a Rightways store. It would impress on the reader that the two stores are very different in setting and philosophy. Carrington's has a luxurious setting and customer care is high on their priority list. Rightways is untidy, sells discounted goods, and the whole approach is to get the customers through the door and sell as much stock as they can. The reader would now be in

³⁰ Photograph of the interior of Macy's Store, New York.
https://www.google.com/search/q=Macy's+Store+oKqb&ved=OCAkQ_AUoAQ&biw=1093&bih=538

the head of William and experience his loathing of such a firm and follow his journey from initial loathing to acceptance.

After researching these department stores I knew that I wanted Carrington's to be similar to the Peter Jones' store on Sloane Square – but on a smaller scale and in the North West of England. There would be large glass doors into a light and airy foyer, a central escalator travelling through open plan departments, to the top floor. The rooftop restaurant is an important addition. The setting, with its cane chairs and hanging plants, has a colonial atmosphere. And with its views over the city it is here where many dramas are played out between my characters Helen, Verity and Celia. It is here that Verity, a friend to both women, unwittingly divulges William's infidelity to Helen.

As part of my research I spoke to staff about the daily running of the store. Many said that being able to work part-time was a great advantage to family life; staff discounts were popular, and promotion to supervisory positions was available after a couple of years as assistants. The hardest part was dealing with difficult customers. This information gave me the idea of my character Celia Langridge becoming a nuisance by returning items to the store. And, from the staff point of view, I was able to write a scene where cosmetics assistant Kirsty, while remaining professional, dealt with Celia through gritted teeth. .

I also thought it appropriate to speak casually to customers in order to get a different point of view and to find out their likes and dislikes. I found people very generous in giving their thoughts in these conversations. I heard views that longer opening hours was an aid to shoppers, especially those people with busy jobs themselves; the benefits of having a wide range of goods under one roof and a nice restaurant to relax in and meet friends. What they did not like

was the crowds and the waiting at tills at busy times. This information aided material to *Carrington*'s. From this research I firstly came up with the idea of how a crowded store could become an easy target for shoplifters and invented store detective Donna. Secondly, I created more scenes to take place in the rooftop restaurant to emphasise the conversations between Helen, Celia and Verity about the problems that can occur in the theme of mid-life.

There were also the settings of homes for the characters. Church Close, nestled in an exclusive cul-de-sac four miles from the city centre, is the home of William and Helen Patterson. The Victorian houses in the close are expensive and symbolise the wealth, status, and successful career of William. Living in the suburbs has existed since the Victorian era when wealthy mill owners moved out of the city for a quieter and healthier lifestyle. But, in the twenty-first century, numerous city centre cotton mills have been converted into apartments, where many people choose to now live such as Toby Benson in his modern city apartment.

However, in choosing the fictional suburban setting of Church Close it was my intention to create a house that is now too big for just William and Helen and to experience⁴ the claustrophobia that Helen longs to escape from. It was also my intention to use the house as bait for the manipulating gold digger, Celia Langridge. On entering the impressive interior with its spacious rooms and large walled garden her obsession for William increases. She pictures herself living there. In the scene where she tries on Helen's dress it was my intention to display her manipulative nature. And the scene where she deletes Helen's answerphone message takes her evilness to a higher level.

In the view of author Juliet Madison (2013 p.1) setting is usually an important part of the novel, and can often become a character in itself. Although much of what I write is character driven the setting I choose helps ground the story in time and place, which adds to the overall realism.

I agree with her view and feel it is important to create settings that readers will become familiar with. An example of a setting I use regularly is the rooftop restaurant at Carrington's store. My intention was to make the reader aware of the atmosphere. And it is important to use the senses. I wanted the reader to hear the chatter, smell the coffee, taste the food, and see the cool green surroundings. This setting I use as the background for the two women in William's life. It is here, amid the hustle and bustle of the restaurant, that Celia tells Verity about a new man in her life. And here, where an unsuspecting Helen, hears the first hint of William's infidelity.

Another setting I used was Rightways store. Situated in a side street, the discount store adopts a pile it high and sell it cheap philosophy. We see the store on William's first visit.

The numerous racks of clothes stood out by their untidy appearance. Dresses without hangers were strewn on the floor. Shoes of all shapes and sizes lay abandoned in the aisles. And the Buffalo logo with its large horns stared down from above as a reminder of everything cheap and nasty. (p. 138)

It was my intention to show this setting of Rightways to heighten William's growing fears of a takeover by a firm contrasting so much to the sophisticated

image of Carrington's. The situation challenges the future of William - a job with this discount store or redundancy?

Another book that uses contrasts of settings is Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*. The initial setting is the fictional Darlington Hall - an archetypal grand English house where Stevens the butler has spent a lifetime in service. His loyalty to Lord Darlington and now Mr Farraday create a crossroads for Stevens. He is offered the use of Mr Farraday's Ford to take a holiday. At first he is not excited at the prospect and explains to the new American owner:

It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls. (p. 4)

But, after the arrival of a letter from ex-housekeeper, Miss Kenton, he decides to take up the offer in order to see her again.

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been pre-occupying my imagination for some days. An expedition, I should say which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford (p. 3)

Here Ishiguro takes the main character away from his everyday residence into the outside world. The journey, where he stays in various guest houses, reverses his usual position, and it is he who is waited on. There is a change of setting both physical and emotional.

Author and editor, C S Lakin, (2012, p. 2) argues that when choosing settings for scenes, we want to think about the kinds of places that will allow the emotions, needs, dreams, and fears of our characters to emerge.

This view is definitely seen in the emotional fears of Stevens. The idea of leaving Darlington Hall, that has been his home for all of his adult life, frightens him. But also in his mind is the fact that he fears he may have served at the Hall but disregarded his own needs in life.

The settings switch between the past and present in the mind of Stevens and he sees the loss of dignity as Lord Darlington leaves and is replaced by the brashness of the new American owner, Mr Farraday. The story, I feel, pivots on the misguided loyalty of Stevens between his master's needs and his own personal needs. He ponders on missed opportunities and the remains of his own days.

Similarities exist between the switches of setting in *Remains of the Day* and *Carrington's* where characters like Stevens and Helen Patterson seek adventure which takes them away from their usual areas. Helen's trip to London shows her a whole new world – Gerry's offer of solicitor training, exploration of London, and the court case experience, all lead to a new found freedom and independence. But the outcomes are different for Stevens as he does not take advantage of his freedom and returns to his old life, whereas Helen leaves her claustrophobic home life in favour of a job and independence.

What I've learned from settings is that they draw the reader into familiar places that they can visualise in their imagination. An example is Carrington's store with its light and airy appearance, and escalator taking customers from the ground floor to the rooftop restaurant. The restaurant setting, used many times, enabled me to expose dramatic conversations between Helen, Celia, and Verity. And, because the store was such a public place, I was able to have characters holding back their true emotions at the time. However, I have now come to

realise that settings do not just apply to places. They can switch mentally for example in *Remains of the Day* in the English class system Stevens the butler living in the servants' quarters and Lord Darlington residing in the grandeur of the hall. Both know their place. Many settings, I feel, are in the mind of the narrator, and switching between the past and present can be done in flashbacks thus transporting the reader into another time. This can be used to explain a back story or the emotions of a character. Ishiguro uses a meeting in flashback to display Lord Darlington's loyalty to right wing politics which in turn shows Steven's dismissing two Jewish workers from the hall. Here the settings are split between Lord Darlington's political affiliations and Steven's loyalty to his master. This setting is given in flashback but not at the beginning. This method adds style.

Style

A style is something an author develops once they start to work on their novels. Finding one's own writing style can be a long process. It can be tempting to impersonate a favourite author. In my first novel *Cappuccinos*, a story about six people who use a small town coffee house, I experimented with the style used by author Peter Mayle in his novel *Hotel Pastis* (1993). He begins by using alternate chapters for characters. In chapter one he introduces Simon Shaw a forty two year old advertising executive pondering on leaving the marital home after his divorce.

Caroline's friends – those thin, smart friends who lived on

salads and the occasional wicked glass of dry white wine – had cooed over the house. Caroline and her team of decorators adored it. Simon had always felt like an untidy intruder. (p. 7)

Here the author uses the first chapter to concentrate on Simon Shaw in his London home reflecting on the financial aspect of his recent divorce.

But the second chapter switches to France and the world of the small time crook Jojo.

The wiry little man they called Jojo was there early, leaning against the warm stone wall, watching the huge moss skinned water-wheel as it turned slowly, shiny green and dripping in the sun. Behind the wheel he could see the ornate gingerbread bulk of the Caisse d'Epargne, a picture postcard building with its elaborate architectural flourishes and fat tubs of geraniums on the entrance steps, more like a melon millionaire's villa than a bank. (p. 22)

Peter Mayle manages, in alternating chapters, to run stories in two different locations before bringing the threads together in the end.

Another author who uses the intercutting style is Truman Capote. In his book *In Cold Blood* (1965) he uses this style to tell the two different stories of the Clutters and the murderers of the two Clutter family members. Although the book is non-fiction and based on true life the final chapter is fictionalised by Capote.

According to Rupert Thomson (2011, p1) Truman Capote took the decision to write the book in self-contained sections. As he began to fit them together he found himself exploiting classic crime genre techniques in order to heighten suspense. Thomson adds 'this is particularly apparent early on in the tense, cinematic inter-cutting between the killers and their victims: as Herb, the

rural Patriarch, consumes his usual breakfast of an apple and a glass of milk, unaware that it would be his last, and his daughter Nancy lays out her velveteen dress for church, the dress in which she was to be buried, the two ex-cons are racing across the wheat plains of the Midwest in their black Chevrolet sedan.’

However Capote saw the execution at the end of the story to be brutal and created an extra fictional scene where the supervising investigator, Alan Dewey, meets Susan Kidwell a friend to Nancy Clutter, at the Garden City graveyard four years later. This scene he thought brought the story full circle.

Intercutting can be seen in television drama and films. An example in television can be seen in the crime series *New Tricks*. The programme features three retired detectives who return to work in the unsolved crime and open case squad under the supervision of their chief, Sandra Pulman. In the episode entitled *Loyalties and Royalties* (broadcast on 28 July 2008) the first scene starts with detective Jack Halford on a deserted beach talking to his dead wife Mary and totally unaware that someone is approaching. The man approaching turns out to be detective Brian Lane who tries to persuade Jack to return to work after the criminal who purposely ran over and killed his wife gets his court case thrown out. Jack declines. The next scene switches to the *New Tricks* signature tune and clips of all four detectives in previous episodes. Then the scene switches to detective Gerry Standing being called to the deathbed of a patient in a care home who says she witnessed a murder years earlier that was labelled as suicide.

The series makes good use of the intercutting style to ease the viewer into the story. The intercutting style allows for sub-plots to interact with the main story throughout the episode. An example can be seen in this episode. The main investigation of the witness of an earlier murder is interspersed with Jack’s

depression and the question of whether he will make the decision to return to work.

Films use the intercutting style to switch scenes. An example of switching from a dark subject to a light one can be seen in the opening scene of the 1972 film *The Godfather*, adapted from the book by Mario Puzo and directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The story is about a fictitious Sicilian Mafia family based in New York headed by Vito Corleone. The film starts with a scene that is both dark in colour and subject. Bonasera is asking Vito Corleone to murder the two non-Italian men who got a suspended sentence for attempting to rape his daughter. Vito eventually agrees. The scene then switches to the grounds outside where the wedding is taking place of Vito's only daughter. The scene is one of a relaxed happy family celebrating a marriage. A far cry from the dark subject of contract killing that opened the film.

When it came to writing my first novel *Coffees* I started by using separate chapters for each of my main characters. Unfortunately I found by the time I had reached the seventh chapter that no main events had occurred and there had been no interaction between my characters. I then realised this was not going to work so I experimented using three or four separate scenes within a chapter. This intercutting style enabled me to introduce my characters more swiftly and I was able to move the story along at a better pace. Peter Mayle's style, although slightly different to the one I now use, certainly influenced me and encouraged me to experiment with different versions.

In *Carrington's* I again use the intercutting style. This method, I hope, allows the reader to gradually connect, incubate, and form an opinion of a character and storyline before moving on to the next section. My aim in using the

intercutting style is to have several stories and sub-plots running simultaneously. My intention is not to confuse readers but to create a better structure so they can digest scenes in smaller quantities.

However, what I have learned is that sections need to be balanced. If too long a gap is taken before a character re-emerges a reader may forget the details and lose the thread. If a character appears too often then this can have the opposite effect of overloading the reader with too much information too soon. One way I've learned to achieve a good balance is to write a summary of the sections in each chapter on index cards and lay them out. This gives me the ability to see the overall picture from the start to the finish of the novel.

Another intention of mine in using the intercutting style was to allow the reader to draw in information more quickly than in a non-intercutting novel. I strive to give the readers pieces of the jigsaw. Early on in the novel they have several of the pieces. By the end of the second chapter six main characters in the form of William, Helen, Margaret, Patrick, Toby, and John Gray have been introduced. Also two main conflicts are up and running. Firstly, there is the situation between William and Helen about her returning to work. And secondly, there is the announcement by John Gray about the possibility of the store closing. It is my hope that the intercutting style allows me to let suspense build and for the reader to ponder on how the threads of the story will come together in the last chapter when the final pieces of the jigsaw are released.

I have also learned that the intercutting style can bring novels full circle by the use of writing scenes in small sections. For example in my first novel *Coffees* (2007) I started the first chapter by introducing property developer, Vincent Bellini, jogging along his usual trail. The novel ends, after all the events

he has gone through, with him jogging along the same track. My purpose in writing these two scenes was to show the character had come full circle. In this case Vincent had not learnt by his mistakes and would continue his life in on the same track.

Carrington's opens with William Patterson returning home from work to Helen at Church Close, who all through their marriage has been a loyal company wife. The novel ends with William returning to his new home in Lancaster where he intends to propose marriage to his next door neighbour, Lorna, who he feels will replace Helen as a good company wife. Here again it was my intention to bring William full circle and highlight the fact that, despite losing Helen, his life would carry on in the same way as before.

What I've learned about the intercutting style in novels is that it comes closest to script writing and films than any other type of novel writing. It is possible to switch between scenes and characters in a more rapid way compared to those that build their stories more gradually. The intercutting style allows numerous small sections of a story to be conveyed to the reader. It was my intention when using this style to increase suspense in the writing. Similar to a jigsaw where initial pieces are handled and a small picture is starts to emerge. As more pieces are added the picture becomes fuller. This hopefully makes the story move forward without losing the plot.

Plot

The plot is about the events that make up a story as they relate to one another in a sequence through cause and effect.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle considered plot the most important element and thought plot must have a beginning, middle and end. The events must relate to each other and arouse emotions.

In addition to his theory about beginnings, middles, and endings, Aristotle described five elements that he considered crucial to the creation of a complex, fully developed plot. They are according to B. McManus (1999, p.1)

Reversals should occur where characters find themselves moving from good fortune to bad, and back again. These serve as climactic moments in a plot.

An example of this can be seen in *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus attempts to escape a prophecy stating he will murder his father and marry his mother, by moving away. But, when he later discovers they were not his real parents, he ends up killing his real father on his way to his new home.

Discoveries – characters need to make discoveries, particularly about themselves.

An example can be seen in David Lodge's novel *Deaf Sentence* which follows the protagonist Desmond Bates adapting to his early retirement and increasing deafness. Here Desmond discovers his strengths through several family rows and complications and adapts to his condition.

Complications – something should stand between the protagonist and his objective.

An example of this can be seen in *Carrington's* as William Patterson's orderly life is challenged by possible redundancy if the takeover goes ahead with Rightways.

Catastrophe – it needn't be an earthquake or a mass murder; it might be an emotional catastrophe, completely internal to your character's psyche. But no plot will be interesting if things go too smoothly. Bad things should happen, even to good people. It's how your characters deal with catastrophe that produces plot.

An example here can be seen in Deborah Moggach's novel *Close Relations* when Gordon Hammond leaves his 45 year marriage for a younger woman. His wife, at first a loose cannon, causes mayhem with her family. But eventually goes on to find not only herself but a new partner.

Resolution – the plot should reach some satisfactory conclusion that continues logically from the events of the story.

An example can be seen in Anita Brookner's novel *Hotel du Lac*. Hope, a romance writer, concludes that she is better off with her lover than in a loveless marriage to the hotel guest she meets.

Aristotle defines plot as “an arrangement of the incidents” – not the story itself but the way the incidents are presented to the audience, the structure of the play. He thought a plot should be structurally self-contained. The beginning should start the incentive moment of cause and effect chain. An example of this can be seen in the first chapter of *Carrington's* where Helen announces her intention of returning to work.

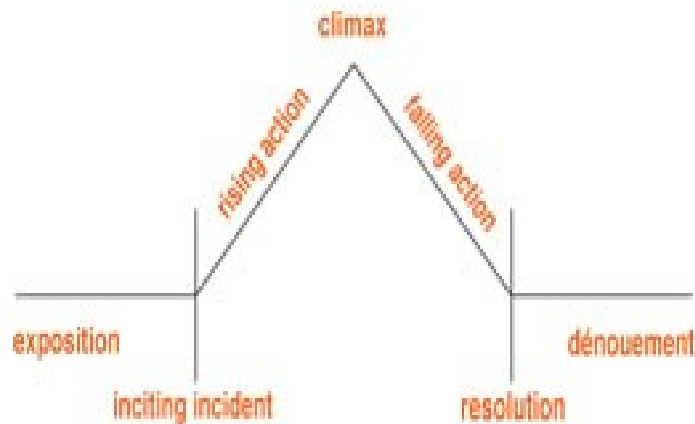
The middle or climax, according to Aristotle, must be caused by earlier incidents and itself cause the incidents that follow. An example in *Carrington's* can be seen when Helen finds out about William's affair with Celia and puts an end to her marriage.

The end or resolution must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents.

An example in *Carrington's* is Helen and William starting their new separate lives. Following this there are no further incidents.

Another view of plots comes from Gustav Freytag (2009, p.1) a nineteenth century German novelist, who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels. He devised a method of analysing plots derived from Aristotle's concept of unity of action. It became known as Freytag's Pyramid. He saw plot as a narrative structure that should be divided into five parts which are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.

Freytag's Pyramid³¹



Elements of Freytag's plot pyramid theory can be seen in *Carrington's*.

Exposition covers the mood and conditions existing at the beginning which include time, place, and main characters. The reader starts to get acquainted with the protagonist and what is at stake if he fails. I introduce William Patterson hearing the news that his wife is determined to return to work. This is followed by rumours that the store might be taken over by the American firm Rightways.

Rising action begins immediately after the introduction of characters and builds to the climax. These events are an important part of the story as the entire plot depends on them to set up the climax. In *Carrington's* I use this phase to display Helen's battle to defy William and return to work, the Rightways takeover becomes a reality, and William meets and starts an affair with Celia Langridge. During this phase we see the true goals of the protagonist and how he works towards them.

Climax occupies the middle of the story. This stage can mark a change for the better or worse. It often divulges the weaknesses of the protagonist. In *Carrington's* I used this phase to display William ending his affair with Celia

³¹ Freytag's Pyramid. <http://www.ohio.edu/people/hartleyg/ref/fiction/freytag.htm>

and Helen discovers William's infidelity. These events will have several knock on effects – news of the takeover by Rightways is leaked to the local paper, and Helen ends her marriage.

Falling action is where loose ends are tied up and can be a time of the greatest tension. And the protagonist can be the furthest away from his goal. In *Carrington's*, the marriage of William and Helen is falling apart, Celia is arrested for destroying stock at the store, and William fears he may lose his job.

Denouement is the time where the plot is resolved. In *Carrington's* I use this phase to tie up all the loose ends and move the story forward twelve months. William and Helen are divorced, Helen is advancing in her new career, and William has been promoted and moved to Lancaster.

The five act structure is out of favour in modern drama. But according to Gary Smailes (2011, p.1) the best way to think of a three act structure is as a simplification of the five act structure.

He gives an example of the three part plot structure with *Star Wars*.

The 3 Act Structure³²

³²³² Smailes, G 'The 3 Act Structure,' <http://bubblecow.net/editing/>

Star Wars - 3-act Timeline

0:00:00	(end of titles)
	Act 1. (40:37) Luke decides to follow Ben, fight for the rebellion, and rescue the princess
0:40:37	
	Act 2. (48:55) Luke finds the princess, loses Ben, and escapes from the Death Star
1:29:32	
	Act 3. (28:43) Luke blows up the Death Star and saves the rebellion
1:58:15	

To compare this three act simplification to *Carrington's* we need to look at what is the inciting incident in the book. Firstly, the incident must have such a big impact on the protagonist that he is left permanently altered and must act to resolve the incident. An example can be seen in *Carrington's* when William learns of the takeover by Rightways. Secondly, we need to look at what incident the protagonist faces. This is the determination of Helen to return to a paid job. Thirdly we have to look at how the conflict is resolved. This involves William getting promotion to the position of Area Manager but his affair with Celia costs him his marriage.

Freytag's pyramid is still around today and although it is possible to adapt the original plan it should be remembered that Frey was trying to structure and explain Old Comedy and Shakespeare in his own day. His rules were laid down for those writing for the theatre and stage.

Kendall Haven (1999, p.81) argues that the story has to flow from scene to scene and be understandable. The plot line, or sequence of events, has to tell the story effectively. Events should not be missing and should occur in the most

effective order. And we should check the order of events create an effective shape for the flow of tension and emotion throughout the story.

He further brings in the argument that one way to evaluate a plot line is to look for cause and effect relationships between the scenes. The events of one scene should set forces into motion that cause the events of future scenes. These new events become the cause of events that appear in later scenes. They should mirror an unbroken chain and flow from scene to scene.

This is what I strived to achieve in *Carrington*'s: for example when Helen Patterson is taken seriously ill William finishes his relationship with Celia Langridge. Celia takes revenge by informing the local paper of the takeover of the store by Rightways.

Keeping track of high and low excerpts can work for some writers by using a graph. In an interview with Helen Sea (2013) she said she uses a graph to map out the points of tension and climax in her novel. This helps her to have an overview and avoids having too many points of tension in one chapter and nothing in another.

I found keeping index cards very helpful while writing *Carrington*'s. I wrote all the scenes on index cards and spread them out on a table. This enabled me to see if the events were spaced out appropriately and if they followed on in a logical sequence.

Plot is bound up with consequences; with cause and effect, action and reaction, human interaction and its results.

An example of this action and reaction can be seen in Nora Ephron's novel *Heartburn* (1983, p.78) a fictional account based on the break-up of her marriage to Carl Bernstein when she was seven months pregnant with their

second child. The action can be seen as husband Mark asks for forgiveness after leaving for the first time:

He sent flowers. He sent jewellery He said he had made the worst mistake of his life and he wanted me back and he would love me forever and he would never hurt me again. (p. 45).

However as they try to repair their marriage Rachel becomes increasingly suspicious of Mark's behaviour:

I went through the receipts: the Marriott Hotel in Alexandria, the Plaza Hotel in New York, the Ritz-Carlton in Boston. And the flowers – so many flowers. (p. 68)

The reaction to the action is shown here as Rachel uncovers the truth of her husband's infidelity as she breaks into his locked study desk.

Every story should be more than a sequence of events along the way. Creative writing theorist, David Sheppard, (2009, pp 14-15) introduces the idea that the first step in plotting is to establish the core of the story around which everything will evolve. This central core is known as the Premise. He adds the Premise in its essence is *conflict*. And conflict can be expressed in three words: X versus Y. For example good overcomes evil, an example of which can be seen in *Carrington's* as Patrick takes advantage of Margaret's drunken state. But Margaret's life changes when her mother dies and leaves her a fortune. She forgives Patrick and pays off his gambling debts and sends him for counselling.

Another example of premise in *Carrington's* can be seen in the form of determination overcoming control. Housewife, Helen Patterson, risks everything to return to work and release herself from the claustrophobic existence she finds in her marriage to the controlling personality of William. He puts barriers in

Helen's way to stop her having any independence. But Helen is determined to break free and, when she discovers William's infidelity, it is she who gains control as the following extract shows.

She poured herself another glass of wine and drank it slowly feeling the alcohol relax her body. After the previous eleven hours her legs ached, her ankles were swollen, and her head was bursting with so much information. The day, she knew, had been a baptism of fire. William would have to learn to adjust to her new life. Now no challenge was beyond her.
(p. 39)

In this passage we see the start of Helen's fight to gain her independence. Her first day at work has been hard. William has been unreasonable about who should make the dinner. But this is a turning point for Helen and she is moving from passive wife to dominant woman.

In my research and in the writing of *Carrington's* I have learned that plot within a novel should be ongoing. It is concerned with the consequences of events. Every cause has an effect. Every action has a reaction. As a writer I found plots changed as I progressed with my novel. The plot has to withstand changes in characters because they evolve over time. Suddenly characters take on a different life than the one you planned for them. This meant much redrafting of earlier ideas. The plot has to be adjusted as time goes on and until a writer reaches the conclusion of their novel in order to keep up the pace.

Pace

Pace is needed in novels to move the plot forward. But at the same time, I believe, it is the skill of a writer to hold back certain details to create suspense. Events in a story can vary between fast moving, slow, and reflective.

In the novel *Hotel Pastis* (1993) Peter Mayle demonstrates taking pace from quick to slow. Workaholic advertising executive, Simon Shaw, takes a holiday in France and decides to stay and convert a disused building into an up-market hotel. The pace at first starts with a frenetic lifestyle in London as seen in the extract below:

The fax machine chirped next door as Simon looked through the message pile. Zeigler had called from New York. Caroline's lawyers. Four clients. The Creative Director, the Financial Director, two Account Supervisors and the Head of Television. And Jordan. God, what a way to start the day. (p. 17)

However, on arriving in France Simon, when his car breaks down, is forced to adopt a slower lifestyle.

He had no car, no hotel reservation – and, from the look of the village, no hotel – no Liz, no Ernest. He was on his own, cut off from the human support system that normally took care of the daily details of his life. But, rather to his surprise, he found that he was enjoying the novelty of it all. (p. 34)

This extract shows not only a slowing down of action but also a slowing down of Simon's attitude. The lifestyle he discovers in France is slow and easy and contrasts with his frenetic life in London.

Pace can also go from slow to quick as can be seen in crime writer Minette Walter's book *The Sculptress* (2008). On the first page she introduces the figure of Olive who has been convicted of murdering her mother and sister:

She was a grotesque parody of a woman, so fat that her feet and hands and head protruded absurdly from the huge slab of her body like tiny disproportionate afterthoughts. Dirty blonde hair clung damp and thin to her scalp, black patches of sweat spread beneath her armpits. Clearly, walking was painful. She shuffled forward on the insides of her feet, legs forced apart by the thrust of one gigantic thigh against another, balance precarious. (p. 1)

The above extract is used to introduce Olive's grotesque appearance.

Here longer sentences are used for descriptions. This, I believe, is done to slow the pace down for the reader to digest all the details.

Pace is quickened as the prison officer tells the young journalist who has come to interview Olive the rules:

You've read the rules, I hope. You bring nothing in for her, you take nothing out. She can smoke your cigarettes in the interview room but she cannot take any away with her. You do not pass messages for her, in or out, without the Governor's permission. If in doubt about anything, you refer it to one of the officers. Clear? (p. 4)

Here the pace quickens. There is the use of many commas to break up the sentences and there is, I feel, a sense of a no nonsense attitude and speed in the dialogue.

It was my intention to show pace involves planting hooks early on in my novel. In chapter two of *Carrington's* William gets some worrying news from his Area Manager.

This is strictly between the two of us.
There's talk about some stores closing.
(p. 28)

My intention was that this scene would establish suspense that would be sustained and developed throughout the rest of the novel. It shows the fine line that William's career pivots on. The reader is left with the question of whether William's store will close. What will happen to William if he loses his job in his fifties?

At this stage the reader may start to feel sympathy for the character. But in the following chapters William displays other sides to his personality the reader may find both intriguing and unpleasant. So pace is about setting hooks for what is to follow.

Author K M Weiland (2013 p.1) holds the opinion that short scenes and chapters, terse sentences, and snappy dialogue all contribute to a feeling of intensity and speed. And long scenes and chapters and extended dialogue create a story with a sense time and place.

As far as pace is concerned I made the mistake on my first draft of *Carrington's* of throwing everything at the reader. I set the scene at the wedding of William and Helen's daughter Catherine – but with adding so many characters in a short space I realised I was artificially forcing the pace. I decided to re-write the first part of the introductory chapter in a quieter place – William's study where he is preparing his speech and reflecting on twenty five years of marriage

Writers often change the format of chapters to add to or detract from the pace of a novel. This system can be very effective. Jean Saunders (1999, p.59) argues that chapters may contain several scenes, which break up the chapter into smaller chunks, but are always relevant to that chapter's progress. And while scenes are complete in themselves, and could be considered mini chapters, they are also part of the whole.

What my research on pace has taught me is that it can increase and decrease at certain stages. It can increase suspense with events or the behaviour of characters. It can decrease by holding back information. I create pace in *Carrington's* by using the intercutting narrative style. Many of my chapters feature three or four characters in different sections where I can switch from one

event to the other. This allows me to have shorter and also longer sections where characters or events need more emphasis as far as the storyline is concerned. An example of this can be seen in some of the longer scenes between Margaret and her mother Grace. My purpose in doing this was to reinforce the relationship between the two women and to illustrate to readers that Margaret was under enormous pressure and this would explain her behaviour outside the home. Shorter scenes can be seen between Toby and Patrick exchanging banter. It is my intention to create a balance between fast and slow pace within my novel to keep the story moving along without compromising the plot. Pace is at the core of a novel when it comes to keeping a storyline alive. If events move too quickly there will be no further suspense to hold the interest of the reader. If events move too slowly the reader will become bored and tire of waiting for something important to happen.

And pace does not just refer to events. The emotions of characters can carry the pace along. An example can be found in Anita Shreve's novel *The Pilot's Wife*, the story of Kathryn Lyon's emotional journey in finding out who her husband really was after he is killed in a plane crash. Pace is introduced to an early scene as she is told her husband is dead:

He caught her elbows as she went down. She was momentarily embarrassed, but couldn't help it, her legs were gone. She hadn't known that her body could abandon her so, could just give out like that. He held her elbows, but she wanted her arms back. Gently he lowered her to the floor. (p. 6)

Here Kathryn reacts both physically and emotionally in quick motion as she hears the dreadful news. One imagines her mind racing as she quickly hits the ground. In comparison Anita Shreve slows down the pace in a later scene.

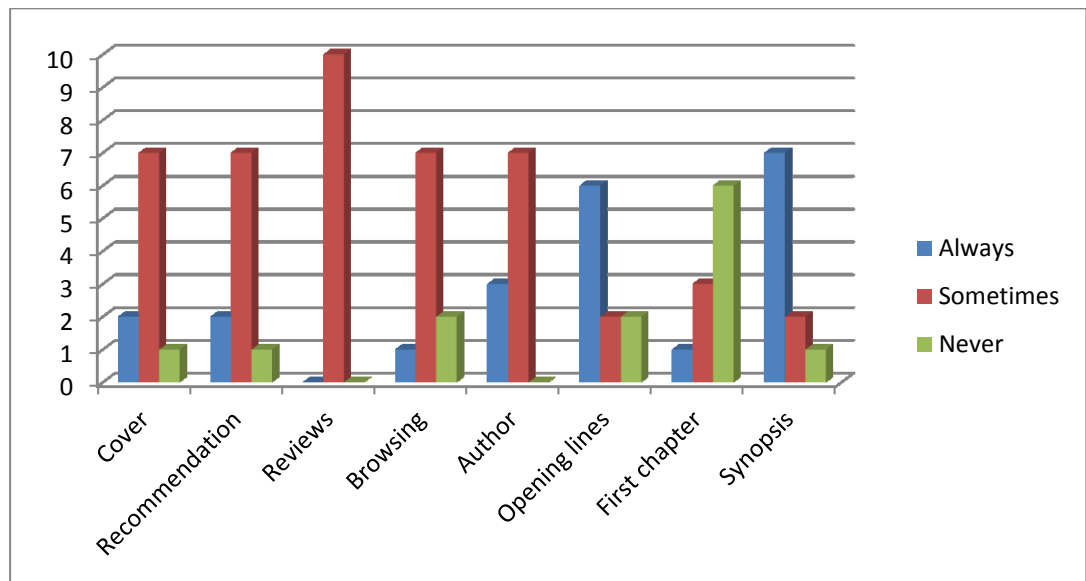
Adjusting to the darkness, she saw that the world was shrouded in a thick quilt of white, a candlewick quilt with shallow stitching, so that the trees and shrubs and cars were simply mounded humps. Indeed, there seemed to be so much snow that she wondered if the predictions of twelve inches hadn't been wildly optimistic. She closed the door and leaned against it. (p. 35)

Here the scene is slow and thoughtful. It seems frozen in time as Kathryn contemplates the view outside.

Beginnings

The beginning of a novel can be used to set the scene, introduce characters, and encourage the reader to read on. The opening lines can be the most important as this is the part that most readers look at when buying a book. I circulated questionnaires to ten readers to research whether the openings of novels persuaded them to buy a book. The readers were chosen from a variety of ages between twenty five and seventy to hopefully give a cross section of the population. Did they read the opening paragraph? Or was it the cover that influenced them? Or did they buy a book that was recommended by a friend? Or would they automatically buy a book because they liked the author? The results were as follows:

Reading Survey Chart³³



From the group of ten readers chosen for the questionnaire it can be seen that 60% always read the opening lines of a book before buying. However 60% said they never read the first chapter before they bought a book. And 70% said they always read the synopsis. 70% sometimes buy a book by its cover. Another 70% sometimes read books recommended by friends. One hundred percent agreed that reviews help them make up their mind to read a book. A further 70% sometimes buy a book while browsing in a shop. Favourite authors were a reason why another 70% bought books

The results from my survey indicate that many readers were in the habit of reading the first few lines of a book before buying. Many also read the synopsis. And many are attracted by the covers.

³³ Reading Chart Survey conducted by D M Bradley – December 2013

Authors have varying approaches to their opening lines. The start of Elizabeth Howard's *Falling* concerns a broken relationship. Henry ponders on the news.

She has left me. This last most terrible blow has knocked me out. I don't seem to be able to think about it for long enough to gain the slightest inkling why this has happened.(p.3)

Henry Kent is a man in late middle age, without means, but an enormous amount of charm. At first he seems a vulnerable and sad character. He may initially get the sympathy of the reader. But when his womanising and manipulating ways come to the fore, that sympathy may well turn to loathing. Elizabeth Jane Howard holds back details in her first chapter and it is only later as the story progresses that we see the cunning and nastier side of Henry.

Author Alan Hollinghurst describes his relationship with beginning a novel in an interview with Peter Terzian in the Paris Review:

There's an immense hesitation before writing the first word. So much depends on it. I've always had the feeling that the first page should somehow contain the whole book in nuce, that it should symbolise important things about the book, and this requires a great deal of calculation. (The Art of Fiction No. 214)

Here Hollinghurst emphasises the importance of the beginning of a novel by suggesting that all important details should be included on the first page and draw the reader into the story.

Another example is Tony Parson's novel *Man and Wife*. The story of middle-aged Harry Silver learning to multi-task the many commitments he has in his complicated life after divorce and re-marriage. He opens with the line:

My son has a new father. He doesn't actually call the guy

dad - come on, he wouldn't do that to me – but I can't kid myself. This guy Richard, bloody *Richard* – has replaced me in all ways that matter. (p. 9)

This opening line displays Harry's ultimate realisation he has almost lost his son to his ex-wife's new partner. These two sentences set up the storyline for the author to transport us through the complications and emotional turmoil of modern life with divorce, re-marriage, and step children.

But, authors vary in their preparation of the beginning of a novel. According to Rick Skwiot (2011) the best thing to do is to hit the ground running, to get things moving in the world of the story.

However, author and creative writing craft theorist Randal Ingermanson (2005, p1) disagrees and is of the opinion that good fiction doesn't just happen. It has to be designed. Once you decide what your story is about you have to deliver the lines that will hold the readers' attention.

Author Deborah Moggach's opening lines in *Close Relations* show a different approach. She begins with a complimentary description.

You had a problem? Gordon Hammond was your man. He was a jobbing builder, a man with a van. (p. 5)

This is a very positive and punchy start. It follows Rick Skwiot's advice to hit the ground running. Gordon Hammond is a reliable man. But, because the opening is so positive, these two sentences also give, I feel, a negative feeling that Gordon may change from his reliable self and enter a world where his behaviour changes.

According to Sabine Reed (2011) the purpose of the first chapter is to hook the reader to the story and it should contain something so unusual that it would motivate the reader to carry on reading.

In my first draft of *Carrington's* I made the mistake of just introducing William Patterson in his study as the lines below show:

One of the unexpected pleasures of a stressful job is to have a quiet hour to oneself at the end of the day, thought William Patterson, as he sat in his study staring at the window in front of him. (p. 8)

The only hint I gave of his personality was later on in the next paragraph when Helen came in and placed a cup of coffee on the desk and left without saying anything. This may have hinted to the fact that he liked his own way and that she was there to serve on him, but it was not necessarily clear. In hindsight I realise I was asking the reader to work hard at taking in what little evidence I had produced in these opening lines. I needed something to not only grab the reader but to get them interested in what might happen later on. There may be a fall from grace or marital rift – but for the reader this was not clear. I then changed the opening as follows:

The fifth of September 1967 would see the first of many turning points in William Patterson's life. At 52 he had climbed the corporate ladder to become manager of the largest department store in the North West. The next move would be to replace John Gray who, as Area Manager, was due to retire in eighteen months. After that would come a directorship. But, unbeknown to him, a chain of events were about to upset his well-ordered life. (p.8)

It was my intention with using this new beginning to tell the reader whose story it is. It was intended to give the reader a greater sense of William's

personality and that his orderly life was soon to be challenged. I believe it is important to introduce the protagonist in the first chapter. The reader needs to know who the story is going to be about and what their goals or predicaments might be. We already now know that William has worked his way up the corporate ladder to achieve prestige – but how he will use those advantages is yet to become known. And will he be challenged? I purposely left open some ideas for William's storyline so that I could add or change events as I wrote. For example would he abuse his position? Would the control he had come to love be taken out of his hands? Would events rock his comfortable lifestyle? Would we see William's downfall?

It was also my aim to not disclose details of William's past at this stage as it is his future that readers want to know about. Past events would be exposed through thoughts and dialogue later on. It is my hope that this opening chapter leaves plenty of intrigue for the reader.

It is the opinion of author Sabine Reed (2011) that the writer faces the question of whether to put the conflict in the first chapter or hold back details for a future chapter. I decided when writing *Carrington's* to use the first chapter to bring out the controlling personality of William. My aim was to introduce a man who, up to the present time, had worked extremely hard, but it was at the cost of his home life. In the first chapter my purpose is to introduce Helen as the loyal wife.

The door opened. Helen put a cup of coffee on the silver coaster on the desk. He nodded but didn't look up. She closed the door quietly on her way out knowing, after twenty five years of marriage, not to interrupt his train of thought. (p. 9)

In this extract it was my intention to show Helen carrying out her domestic duties. But, this leaves the door open for her transformation into career woman. I show the calm before the storm. The passage below was written to demonstrate Helen's determination and also anguish over her decision to return to work.

She'd run a home, managed several large charity projects over the years, and had no young children to worry about. On Monday morning she would be behind her new desk of the modern offices of Barker, Barker, and Slater. It would be a new stage in her life. Now all she had to do was tell William.
(p. 10)

My purpose in writing this scene was to hint at the conflict that may develop between husband and wife. Helen has kept her decision to return to work a secret from William. It was my intention to create tension for later scenes when he would find out. This follows on from the hook already planted about William's surprise holiday to Tenerife. I hoped to show the different goals of the couple. William wanted a wife at home. Helen wanted to escape the home.

The beginning of a novel is often not the start of the story. *Carrington's* begins with William arriving home to add the finishing touches to his speech for the silver wedding party. Yet, this is only a starting point. My aim was to lead the reader straight into the world of William Patterson's personality. I purposely held back details of the Patterson's relationship. This allowed me to divulge details gradually as the chapters progressed and also through future events that threatened William's domineering manner such as his fierce opposition Helen's

job, the takeover by Rightways, and his subsequent affair with the manipulating Celia. It was my intention to set up a chain of events that would alter William and Helen's lives forever.

I also decided to end the first chapter in complete contrast to the start. Whereas chapter one started in the quiet of William's study I ended it with William and Helen having a fierce argument.

She looked at her reflection in the dressing table mirror.
She knew her own adventure was just beginning. (p. 20)

My intention here was to show the excitement of Helen's venture. Her journey will be one of peaks and troughs and I wanted to transfer this to the reader and set the scene for the many changes she has ahead.

What I've learned is that the beginnings of novels are vitally important. They are the first part that a reader and editor see and this can be the deciding factor as to whether he/she will buy/publish the book. The beginning has to introduce the characters and lay down the story that is to unfold. It has to expose some issues and hold back others. Often we have to decide where the beginning of a novel ends and where the middle starts.

Middles

My intention in the writing of *Carrington's* was to use the first two chapters to introduce all the main characters. Within these chapters some character flaws and early conflicts had been introduced. The middle of the novel would follow on from this by intensifying the characters, adding intrigue and plot complications. For example Celia Langridge's evil manipulation would be exposed, William's

midlife stress would be increased as the takeover by Rightways becomes a reality, and Helen's determination to launch her career is strengthened as she reinvents herself.

In the middle section it is essential to bring in further suspense without making the plot too complicated. There is a need for the build-up of tension that will be resolved at the end of the book.

Harvey Chapman (2008, p.1) argues the middle section deals with the action and thinks of this as the start of the character's journey. He goes on to say that in some novels, this will be a literal departure – the ship leaving the harbour, the explorer setting out for the South Pole, the young man leaving home to find his place in the world.

An example of this can be seen in Joanna Trollope's novel *The Rector's Wife* (1991) which uses the middle section to bring in the action as Anna, the loyal but disheartened rector's wife, breaks with tradition and starts working at the local supermarket in order to send her daughter to a private school. She then finds she has three male admirers which causes gossip in the parish. These peaks and troughs lead to a tragic event that will change her life forever.

What I've learnt from my research into the middles of novels is that the peaks and troughs that occur therein can be both physical and emotional journeys. For example Anna despises her husband Peter's silence and isolation from her. She is torn between her loyalty to the church and her daughter's suffering. In my interview with the author, Helen Sea, she told me that most of the dramatic moments in her books take part in the middle section. She makes use of a graph to see the peaks and troughs – and checks to see if they happen too much or too little in order to balance the story. Until conducting this

interview I had never thought of using a graph. Up until now I have used index cards to show all of the sections within each of my chapters. However, a graph is much more visual and gives an immediate overview of the whole story. This has taught me that my own novel would have benefited from the use of a graph to see where the highs and lows of *Carrington's* occurred. Examples can be seen in Margaret Haddock's discovery of her dead mother, Reg Perkin's arrest after a student goes missing, and Helen falling seriously ill while William enjoys his weekend away with Celia.

I've also learnt that the transitions from chapter to chapter in the middle section need to flow. It can be used to shift emphasis from one angle to another such as a change of setting, time, or viewpoint. In *Carrington's* I use my intercutting style to chop and change between all three in order to keep the story alive and create variety for the reader

However, middle sections can sag. Jean Saunders (1999 p.71-73) argues this can happen when an author reaches a stage where instead of flowing onwards the middle seems to flag and becomes uninteresting. A solution can be reached by going back and dissecting the elements more thoroughly. Also it is important to look again at the characters. See if they can be enriched by adding a few extra flaws.

This advice influenced my decision when working on the middle section to make my character Donna more dramatic. I felt this character, as head of the luggage department, was not interesting enough and was holding back the middle section. My first change was to reinvent her as a store detective. This enabled me to write a scene where she follows two possible shoplifters in the store thus adding tension. My second change, as she was back on the dating

scene, was to have her visiting a lesbian club, Valentines. This scene, I felt, would take the reader into Donna's world. It is a place where she escapes to after splitting from her partner Bobbie. The scene at Valentines enables me to show how she discovers she is no longer a young woman and the loneliness she feels. It acts as a precursor to her meeting the beautiful, educated and sophisticated Sophia.

Another new scene added to avoid a sagging middle was to show more flaws in my character Celia Langridge. I initially introduced her as an attractive but lonely divorcee but I felt this storyline was going nowhere. I took craft writer Jean Saunder's advice and gave Celia extra dimensions to her personality by changing her from a bitter divorcee to a very dangerous woman. When she realises William is dumping her she takes revenge by exposing the Carrington's takeover to the local paper. Later she destroys items in the store. Celia's savage revenge takes William's worries to a new level and his life continues to spiral out of control.

She picked up the phone and dialled. "Moulton Chronicle," said the voice. "Good evening," said Celia. "I may have some interesting news for you. It concerns Carrington's store. (p. 194)

This passage displays a revengeful act by Celia. Up until this point we see Celia as a warm lover to William. But after publicly leaking details of the takeover we start to see her manipulating side.

However, in the opinion of Roselle Anguin, (1999 p.135) the middle section is not always in the middle of the novel. She believes the main function of the middle is to maintain the building of tension to the climax, which does not actually come in the middle, but close to the end. She adds that characters will

probably have lived through an opening crisis; the middle often presents another one, the outcome of which is linked to the final crisis which forms the climax of the book.

In the middle section of *Carrington's* my intention was to use dramatic scenes as a response to earlier actions of characters. An example can be seen when Reg attacks Eric in retaliation for him ringing the police and which led to his subsequent arrest. Another example can be seen in Celia passing on details about Rightways takeover to the local newspaper.

But the piecing together of the beginning and middle sections is not always simple. When writing *Carrington's* I found I needed to invent some new characters to cover the thoughts of certain characters. One of these involved the invention of Verity who as a friend to both Helen and Celia was able to play a 'go between' and pass on pieces of gossip and information to Helen (the wife) and Celia (the mistress).

I used the middle section to create peaks in the action. Helen ends her marriage. Rightways takes over Carrington's store. Celia's commits sabotage in the bridal department. This now left the resolving of many events to the end section.

What my research into the middle section of a novel has taught me is that it is the largest section and contains most of the action. The plot increases and sub-plots come into play. It is here the characters show their true selves.

What I had not realised is that characters grow and evolve as the writing progresses. Suddenly they are my friends and their actions may now be different to what I originally planned. But the conclusion is left for the end of the novel. Beginnings, middles and ends should not stop abruptly before continuing to the

next section. According to Roselle Angwin (2002 p.132) a skilled novelist will weave together seamlessly the beginning, middle and end, so that the forward development seems natural, and indeed inevitable. The middle will be followed by the end of a novel.

Endings

The ending is used to deliver some of the promises that were set out in the middle section. It can be a time when the whole story comes together. Many characters may have changed and evolved, plots will have unfolded, and the storyline, depending on the book, will have perhaps come to fruition. We may at certain moments have been on the edge of our seats. Our minds will have been so engrossed in the fiction but the final outcome can be different to what we expected.

The endings of two novels which both unfold over a period of twenty four hours are Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy* can be compared. While the beginning of a book may receive a lot of the attention, it is often the ending that stays with the reader. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is preparing to host an evening party. During the day she looks back on her life and questions her choice of husband in the reliable Richard Dalloway instead of the mysterious Peter Walsh. Running parallel is the story of WW1 veteran, Septimus Smith, who suffering from hallucinations later in the evening commits suicide. This act allows Clarissa to see the beauty of life and lose her doubts and fears. His death means her rebirth. Although there is great sadness at the suicide the ending is optimistic for Clarissa.

In *Intimacy* Jay's emotional journey takes place over the twenty four hours before he walks out on his wife and two young boys. In middle age he feels hatred of entrapment and domesticity. He longs to escape. He battles with old family constructs in a modern society. He balances sexual desire against intellectual desire. The next morning he leaves his home to be with a younger woman. But the ending, unlike *Mrs Dalloway*, is not optimistic as it is full of doubts. It is impossible to know how the new relationship will unfold. Whether it will succeed or fail.

Endings do not necessarily have to be neat and tidy. Many are open ended and the reader left with an inconclusive finale upon which they have to place their own personal view on how a character will deal with the cards he/she has been dealt. An example of this type of ending can be seen in the final lines of *Deaf Sentence* a novel by David Lodge about the trials and tribulations of getting older and becoming increasingly deaf.

The Eiffel Tower was built as a temporary structure for the 1889 Paris Exhibition, and was much criticized at the time. It was supposed to be demolished afterwards, but the populace became fond of it and it was saved when a wireless transmitter was put on the top. I always learn something new at the lip-reading class.(p. 234)

In these lines it is my interpretation that linguistics expert Professor Desmond Bates is coming to terms with his deafness but only after putting up a fight against his condition. But becoming deaf is only part of the story. Bates has to also accept other challenges such as being made redundant, coping with his elderly father, and observing the successful business venture of his wife.

However, according to Jean Saunders (1999 p.54) the true climax usually comes just before the end.

This advice is something I struggled with and went against because I wanted to reveal most of the finalities for *Carrington's* in the last two chapters. As William and Helen are the main characters I devoted the penultimate chapter to Helen and the last chapter to William. For these I move on in time six months. We see Helen divorced and now settled in her legal training. Included in this chapter is the outcome of Reg Perkins who gets a custodial sentence for recording bedroom scenes at the Green Gable apartments where he works as a janitor. In the last chapter William has been promoted to Area Manager and is now living in Lancaster. Included in this chapter is the fact that Celia has got a suspended sentence for her sabotage at the store. And William is considering proposing marriage to his new neighbour.

The end of a novel, I believe, should bring together all the threads to a satisfactory conclusion. I also believe a short ending to a novel is better because after a large middle section where the majority of events take place, this only leaves the job to tie up all the loose ends.

Dianne Doubtfire (1983, p.30) is of the opinion that we should see the main character has been through some difficult times but has emerged on the other side in a better position. An example of this can be seen in Joanna Trollope's novel *Marrying the Mistress* (2001, p330) as she ties up the loose ends for her main character Guy Stockdale. For seven years he has had a mistress in barrister Merrion Palmer. When he decides to end his marriage the journey is not as rosy as he imagined. In the final pages he talks to his grandson:

I'm divorcing Granny so I shouldn't stay in Stanborough.
Because I'm not marrying Merrion so I shouldn't stay
in London. (p. 330)

In the above excerpt Guy Stockdale expresses the mixed loyalties after the break-up of a long marriage. This ending is unresolved.

I couldn't have borne it not to have happened. I couldn't have borne not to know Merrion. I couldn't have borne not to have loved her. (p. 330)

Here Joanna Trollope expresses the emotional journey of her main character.

Another example can be seen in Caro Fraser's novel *A World Apart* (2007) when forty-two-year-old Mark Mason who, having left his wife for a much younger woman, observes his more mature landlady Alice:

What must it be like, he wondered, to have burned such a bright star, your youth and loveliness celebrated, and to be middle aged and tired and faded.(p. 212)

In this passage Mark is sadly reflecting on how middle age changes our appearance. Through his observation of Alice he realises the same has happened to himself. His younger mistress has discarded him and he feels very alone. He realises he has made a dreadful mistake by leaving his wife and family.

By deciding to use the theme of mid-life in my novel I hoped to be able to present the reader with a variety of interesting stories such as infidelity, change of career, redundancy, marital break down and divorce. But having to tie up the loose ends does not necessarily mean everyone ends up happy and content. Many of my characters have been through big emotional upheavals and their lives have changed forever.

An example can be seen in my character Patrick who is bored with his job and struggling with debt. In his thirties he falls into what the Relate Survey states is the unhappiest decade for many people. He has been at Carrington's for twenty years and feels he is not appreciated. His gambling addiction is out of control. He finds it impossible to form a loving and meaningful relationship. Towards the end of the novel we see Margaret paying off his gambling debts if he promises to go for counselling. He is unpredictable in his behaviour. He may well go back to his old ways.

Another example of loose ends not being tied up in *Carrington's* can be seen in the character of peeping Tom, Reg Perkins. He is likely to get a prison sentence for spying on Donna and Sophia at their flat – but whether this punishment will see him mend his ways is not known. My intention in choosing this end for Reg was hopefully to let readers make their own judgement.

For the last two chapters of my novel I chose to leap forward twelve months. It was my intention for readers to know how the lives of the characters continued after all the events that had taken place. The fact that Reg has been arrested for placing a video device in the bedrooms of several residents at the Green Gables apartments is mentioned in a conversation between Helen and Bernard while waiting in the entrance of the court house. Helen, in the penultimate chapter, is now divorced, training to be a solicitor and enjoying an independent lifestyle.

However I felt it was important to leave what happens to William until the very end of the novel.

He had been in the Lancaster house for six months. It was within easy distance of Head Office and at the

centre of the nineteen stores that now came under his command. (p. 247)

In the above passage it was my intention to show William is still a workaholic. His much wanted promotion to Area Manager has come to fruition and, despite losing Helen, he has not learned by his past mistakes.

The knowledge I have gained about the endings of novels is that there does not have to be a satisfactory resolve to all the events and characters in the storyline. This, of course, can vary depending on what the story involves. Often a definite ending is not necessary such as in the case where a storyline is ongoing such as a family saga, or an emotional journey that does not have an immediate solution. In cases like this the reader needs to be able to analyse an ending in their own mind. In *Carrington's* I leave William Patterson considering a future proposal of marriage to his neighbour Lorna. He admits she is not as attractive as his ex-wife Helen, but sees her as good company wife material. This is not necessarily the end of the story as we do not know if Lorna will accept or if she does whether the marriage will last. What we do know is that William has not changed his character.

Conclusion

The writing of *Carrington's* took four years to complete. I was to find that authors of fiction face a multitude of challenges. We have to write about experiences, real or imagined, that we have shaped through our individual imaginative and critical processes.

The backdrop of my novel is a busy department store. My memories from childhood were of the 1950s store where my father worked. My challenge now was to bring that store into the twenty-first century with its twenty-four-seven shopping experience.

The planning stage for *Carrington's* took a month. Methods of constructing fiction vary from author to author. Readers often assume an author forms an idea and starts to write – and indeed some do use this method. Crime writer, Minette Walters, does virtually no planning and it is not until she is close to the end of her books that she knows who the murderer is.

I feel that planning underpins the bringing together of a well-balanced novel which leaves the author free to be creative within that framework. My planning of *Carrington's* involved brainstorming to produce further ideas. I then moved on to mind mapping and made more connections with branches expanding original ideas. Finally I used Randal Ingermanson's Snowflake Method from which I produced a skeleton of plots, sub-plots, characters, chapters and scenes. This gave me an overview of the novel before I started writing.

The first draft of my novel was a voyage of discovery. It was only when the time came to put pen to paper that I realised I'd not made interconnections for some characters to allow for inner thoughts to be released. I created the character of Verity to connect Helen, William and Celia. I also needed the reader to see Reg Perkin's home life so for this I invented Eric as the nosy neighbour. The experience has taught me that the original skeleton has to be flexible to allow for adding or subtracting characters and scenes as the novel progresses.

Carrington's has a multiple narrative strand. I use an intercutting multiple viewpoint approach whereby only three or four characters appear in a chapter – hopefully this enables the reader to re-connect with them when they re-appear. I feel the advantage of this technique is that it presents the reader with

small sections to contemplate, building up each character's personality little by little – and leaving enough intrigue and expectation on their eventual return.

Another writer who uses a similar system is Arthur Hailey. He creates formulaic potboiler structures and takes ordinary characters and involves them in a crisis. He then increases suspense by alternating between multiple related plot lines. Two examples of his novels are *The Final Diagnosis* (1959) about hospital politics, and *Wheels* (1971) about the American car industry.

My characters are a combination of people from my past and present life that I have known or observed. Margaret Haddock is loosely based on the cook at the 1950s store. She was a larger than life person and had a heart of gold. Reg Perkins is based on a creepy British Railway employee in the town where I grew up who spent his lunch hours chatting to strangers.

Characters are often created from a writer's life experiences and observations. However, interpretations of materials may differ from one human being to another. Personality can play a part. Introverts, with their capacity for deep analysis may well process material differently to extroverts. *Carrington's* may well delve deep into my own life experiences or observations of others.

To assist me in the writing of *Carrington's* I looked to other writers for inspiration. I examined a wide range of relevant texts, including thirty contemporary novels on the theme of mid-life, and assessed their usefulness in style, approach and characterisation.

I learnt a great deal about the different approaches to writing from interviewing four published authors – Dr Clare Dudman, Alison Leonard, Priscilla Masters, and Helen Sea. Dr Dudman told me she did an enormous amount of research for her novels which had taken her to China, Greenland, and

Patagonia. Alison Leonard incubated an idea for her novel *Tinker's Career* for over twenty years.

Other areas that assisted me in the writing of *Carrington's* were the monthly tutorials with my supervisor, Dr Robert Graham. These meetings were invaluable, informative, and extremely beneficial. Each month I would submit novel chapters or work I had carried out on research. I was to gain a great deal of advice on style, point of view, characterisation, and numerous other areas. Often we would have discussions about whether a scene worked. For example Robert thought the storyline about the cruel bet between Toby and Patrick on whether one of them could get Margaret into bed was not working. I re-wrote a scene where Patrick meets Margaret by chance at the cinema and they go home together.

My novel would not have been completed without Robert's valuable support and help throughout the past four years.

Another area of support was the monthly PhD creative writing workshops. Held in various locations in Manchester we submitted our work on a rota basis. Having other students as my audience was unbelievably beneficial. The advantage being that they were all writers and were not only able to point out my mistakes but help me create alternative ideas. The workshop was also successful because we were all at different stages in our PhD studies.

I also learnt a great deal from attending PhD courses run by the Research and Development office in Manchester. Between 2009 and 2012 I attended twenty five daytime courses. These included subjects like Time Management, Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing, Managing your Research Project, and Writing for Publication.

Writers grow as much as their characters and stories. Factors are involved in producing a literary text: the writer's life experiences, observation skills, capacity for reading, the ability to examine one's own conscious thoughts and emotions, and to retain memories. Interpretations may vary from one writer to another by means of internal perception. Introverts, with their capacity for deep analysis may well process material differently to extroverts who are outgoing, talkative and energetic. All of these create a launch pad from which to start writing.

I have spent a great deal of my life observing people and situations – from public places to friends and family to films and television. But writing is more than introspection. It is a craft that has to be learned. Material and ideas have to be organised into characters, storylines and chapters. Learning this process has shaped who I am and I have been able to grow as both a writer and a person.

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APPENDICES

Interview Transcripts

Clare Dudman
Alison Leonard
Priscilla Masters
Helen Sea

Postal Interviews

Joan Bakewell
Susan Hill
Post card from Alan Bennett
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Reader Survey

Covering letter for reader survey
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Diary

Diary of the writing of *Carrington's* 2009 - 2013

Bibliography

INTERVIEWS

CLARE DUDMAN

Clare Dudman started her career as a scientist but always had the desire to write. Her novels are very varied. She does extensive research and she has travelled to such places as Denmark, Germany, China and Greenland. For her novel *A Place of Meadows and Tall Trees* (2009) she travelled across the Patagonian desert to interview descendants of Welsh settlers who had arrived there in 1865. Having been born in Wrexham in North Wales she was fascinated by the migration of many Welsh people to this part of the world.

I chose to interview Dr Dudman in order to explore her planning methods in view of the fact her initial ideas for her novels take her to all corners of the world.

Interview Transcript

8 September 2011

PhD student: Diana Bradley

Interview with Dr Clare Dudman

DB First of all thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.

Question 1.

DB How much time do you spend planning and researching your novels?

CD It depends really because all of my novels have been quite different. My first novel took about two years to research. The second one which was part of a two book deal so it had to be out a bit more quickly took about one year to research and write. The third one took about two years at least. And the next one is still on-going.

Question 2.

DB As your writing has progressed do you find you now plan your novels in a different way? If yes, please explain methods.

CD I think it's not really due to my progression but it is due to the topics that I'm doing, so my novels have changed in the way I plan them. The first adult novel was like a fictionalised biography of a man so it just follows his life. So I had to research his life and aspects around his life to get into the place and the character. The second one was similar being a historical novel of a certain person but more fictionalised because one of the elements was inventive. And the third one was about a population of

people and that was much more inventive and took a longer time because I had to research what they do as a population and also research and invent the characters and so change them in that regard. The fourth novel which I'm currently writing at the moment is completely different again because it is a fantasy and is placed in different places and different times and so this has involved lots of research as well. So my methods have change but it is due to the book rather than my progression as a novelist I would say.

Question 3.

DB Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework e.g. grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, and deadlines?

CD No, not really. I think it has to be planned to some extent but things like grammar and punctuation and genre don't really come into it. I think they would be quite inhibiting. I think it is important that you let ideas flow. I think you use different parts of the brain to invent ideas. The left hand side of the brain you would use for grammar, punctuation and genre. And the right hand side would be used for creativity. So I think if you try to keep in mind too much of the grammar and all of that then it would kind of inhibit you and you wouldn't be as creative. And I also think that it probably depends on your education as well. If you are really well educated in English and gone to the right schools where it is inculcated into you about grammar and punctuation, which it wasn't in my case, it would be a much more natural thing rather than if you are coming to it

from a different educational background. So you would have to concentrate on that bit.

Question 4.

DB Do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity?

CD Yes and no. I think you have got to have some sort of plan to it because, and I personally have to have some sort of plan to it just to keep me in line and to prevent me from going too bonkers. So I think you've got to have a bit of pre-planning but for myself not too much of a rigid plan.

Question 4.

DB In your novel writing have you used any particular methods e.g. note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer databases to assist you in your work?

CD Yes I've used all of those. I've used loads and loads of notes for all of my research. I quite often use journals. I often use journals to get ideas down. Mind mapping enables me to get new ideas and make connections that I would not have thought of otherwise. I use data bases to keep track of what I've read and what I've used. And this enables me to go back to it when necessary toward the end if I want to find something out about it.

Question 6.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above have these methods helped? However I think the above explanation is sufficient don't you?

CD Yes I agree.

Question 7.

DB When starting a novel do you look for any of the following?

- (a) an idea**
- (b) a place**
- (c) a topical story from a newspaper**
- (d) a favourite time in history**
- (e) an event in your own life**
- (f) other?**

CD I think an idea is the most important aspect because this is something I want to get across. I think that is the most important perspective. Also this means the character has to make a discovery and undergoes something that changes him and he learns something. I think that the idea is important. The place is also important because I like setting things in a different place because I like to see things from the outside. That is why I've chosen places I don't know very well so that I can go and look at them and get an idea from that. I think again that this enables me to be creative seeing things from the outside rather than being from within. I don't really use topical stories although I have used a bit in my latest novel because some of the ideas that come from the newspapers have come into this. And I am also using ideas from scientific research papers as well which are modern. A favourite time in history? I have used this to some extent in my novel because I've always been interested in pre-historic civilizations and settlements which I'm using a lot now. An event in my own life? I don't work from a character but you do need to

use events from your own life to incorporate the thoughts and feelings of what has happened to you – so yes I do these days.

Question 8.

DB Where do your characters come from?

- (a) People I've known**
- (b) Strangers I've observed**
- (c) Family members**
- (d) Friends**
- (e) Work colleagues**
- (f) Teachers**
- (g) Bosses**
- (h) Partners**
- (i) They are a combination of people I've known**
- (j) They are completely made up**
- (k) Other (please state)**

CD I think it is a combination of all of those if I'm honest. One character that I really remember was this man I observed who was serving in Marks and Spencer. I thought here's a brilliant character. I didn't know him but I just observed him for a little while and then invented the rest of what he was like so none of them are actually based on people I've actually known. I think for me it is better to choose characters I don't know very well and so that I can invent more. I think if I knew them too well and they were based on people I knew really well I'd find that a bit inhibiting

to some extent. I think I'd like to be free to invent. So I think they are a combination of everybody.

Question 9.

DB Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?

- (a) Storyline from start to finish**
- (b) Storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end**
- (c) Plots**
- (d) Sub-plots**
- (e) Characters**
- (f) Interconnection of characters**
- (g) Chapters**
- (h) Scenes**
- (i) Other (please state)**

CD Yes, I think the storyline is the main thing I do. I need a storyline and where it is going before I start really. And I'll map it out. I'm not really sure about plots and subplots as they sort of come along as I'm writing. I know the characters quite well before I start and quite often do thumbnail sketches of them, have a photograph of them, know the colour of their hair so that I keep that consistent throughout the book. I also do a character sketch and put that on the wall so that I've got them in front of me all the time and feel I know them. Scenes I research so I can see those in my mind.

Question10.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you? Do you have a set time?

CD No. It's an evolving thing all the time really. I suppose the story unfolds as I'm doing it and that's a kind of continuous thing really. One of the other things is the difficulty of saying how long you'll take. I suppose you take the whole research time and the time it takes to write the novel. So difficult to answer.

Question 11.

DB Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process?

(a) Yes

(b) Yes and I sometimes have to create new scenes/or alter existing scenes to show them off to their full potential

(c) Yes and I often have to create a new character to display the mental thoughts of the original character

(d) Yes – but once I've invented them I do not alter them

(e) No this never happens as I've planned everything meticulously beforehand

(f) Other (please state)

CD Yes, they do a bit. I've got quite a firm idea of who they are and what they are going to do. But I don't think I create new scenes. I probably alter existing scenes. I'm not usually conscious that I'm doing this to this character because I suppose I do it more for the story. I don't think I

change/create a character to display the mental thoughts of an original character – my work is usually in the first person so I don't really need to do that.

Question 12.

DB It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery.

When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned?

- (a) Very close**
- (b) Close but some plots have changed**
- (c) Close but some characters have changed**
- (d) Slightly different**
- (e) Very different to the one I set out to write**
- (f) Other (please state)**

CD This is a difficult question to answer. In my first novel it was close, very close. But some characters had changed I think. The second one I'd say again was very close but some of the characters have changed a bit, developed a bit. The third one that was set in Patagonia was very different to the one I set out to write. I had a lot of trouble with that book. That went through a huge number of metamorphoses just to get the right story. For my present book I researched silk and the history of silk and then decided to combine it with immunology. I then put ideas that I wanted to put in my novel and used post cards and then threw them up in the air and then sorted them in a random order and then spent the

entire night without sleep because I think that helps your creativity as well to sort out this novel. So that is how I did it. But having said that I changed chapters and now I'm doing a kind of mind mapping as well to enable the chapters to interact with each other. Of course this might not work at all. It could be a theoretical "don't do your novel like this."

Question 13.

DB Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

CD What I thought was interesting was that two years ago I came across a man called

Henri Poincare who was a French mathematician in the early twentieth century. He thought a lot about creativity and what he said was that he thought the mind is like a room and on the inside of the room the ideas were like hook atoms – hooks along the wall – and you could think about an idea (and that would be I think the left side of the brain) in a formal logical way about these ideas. And it is when you come to have moments of insight and creativity that the best thing for him was not to think about the problem at all but to go off for two hours and think about mathematical problems and deliberately not thinking about the original problem only to find that he would have tremendous insight. What he thought was happening was that all these hooked atoms on the inside of this room of his mind were all whirling around and because he wasn't thinking about them had hooked together and a great creative idea would come through these hooked atoms. He said the greatest and most

beautiful ideas came from the totally unrelated ideas. I think that is really good because we see similar ideas coming through in writing.

Acknowledgement

DB I would like to thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Your answers will help me enormously in my research.

= = = = =

ALISON LEONARD

Alison Leonard has been a writer for over forty years. Her early career covered books for children and teenagers. Her first book *The Crest of the Dragon* was published in 1975. Her novel *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye* (1991) was part of a W H Smith promotion called 'Real Books for Real Teenagers.' She then wrote plays for BBC Radio 4 including *Small Clouds over Llangollen*. In the last ten years she has branched out into adult fiction. Her novel *Flesh and Bronze* looks at great art from the point of view of the model and the artisan. *Heavenly Lilies* is set in 1996, soon after the Fred and Rose West case. A jury member on a similar case is unable to make a judgement due to her own sexual history.

I chose to interview Alison Leonard because she has been an established writer for most of her adult life and her writing diversifies into a variety of subjects. I was curious to find out how she plans her work, where she gets her ideas from, and how she manages to work in different genres.

Interview Transcript

4 February 2013

PhD student Diana Bradley

Interview with Alison Leonard

DB First of all of all Alison I'd like to thank you for agreeing to this interview

Question No 1

DB How much time do you spend researching and planning your novels?

AL The amount of time varies. But the amount of research is always more than you think. If somebody is going on a car journey you can do with knowing what kind of car it is and whether they are a confident driver. And if you are setting it in a real place, and I always set my novels in real places, you have been there and seen it. And was it raining and that sort of thing so that when I'm describing things it becomes a reality for the reader. And even processes for instance in *Tinker's Career* which is all about a teenager who realises there is a dreadful secret in her family and the dreadful secret was a hereditary illness. So I had to get that right and find out how the disease was carried, what the consequences were and so on so that she would find out, and maybe find out about it and have them correct it. I do think it is essential to get your facts right about things. But I could not say really how long that takes me because I may need to

check and re-check and if a plot line doesn't work out I have to go back to the beginning. Now I've dealt with research there.

Now planning is a huge thing. And that's where the answer is so different for different novels. If I take *Tinker's Career* again that was very simple - I had come across somebody with that hereditary disease twenty years before I started writing and when I came across them I was doing a totally different job. I didn't know that I was into writing. I just thought "oh my goodness just imagine if you have that in your family". And I remember the family –there were these two little girls and I got very attached to one of them. Then I left the area and lost contact with them and all that sort of thing. But this was churning away at the back of my mind because one morning when I'd had things published and I was feeling that I was actually a writer I woke up and I had the title which is a pun on the name of the illness which is Huntington's Chorea, the name of the girl, the character of the girl, the family situation – a father, a stepmother, and a mysterious dead mother, and a little half-brother. And I had the plot that she was going to set off on her own – but she'd better have a friend so she isn't lonely and she has someone to talk to. It was all there as I woke up.

DB It was almost as if you had been incubating it for a number of years.

AL I never thought of that word incubating. But that is exactly it. Whereas, you say down here in your questionnaire, do you have a favourite time in history? My very first novel was written when I was particularly

interested in local history. We'd moved to Chester which is a place choked with history and we went to Beeston Castle rising on a rocky site in the Cheshire plains and dramatic things went on there in 1399. I thought I'm going to follow that up and if a story emerges I'll write the story around that. And that was much more pre-planned because I had to get to know the history so that I could write a story in a flowing way without having to stop and check. It was a time I'd studied, not in history, but in literature because it followed exactly the timescale. I mean another writer shall we say William Shakespeare had written Richard the second and it was the end of his reign and the beginning of Henry 1V and so I had my drama out there. And I needed a drama that was local. I had another very specific reason for writing that kind of a novel. At the time in the 1970s historical fiction for teenagers was taking up some of the best writers, and publishers were ready. They said teenagers were reading historical fiction lets publish more. So, as a beginner, I'd spotted a market and it was published by the second publisher I sent it to. So I'd obviously got something right there. So it was a very different thing. It was based on an idea that in this place, in this particular time in history, there would have been a story. Whereas *Tinker's Career* was the one that had anguish, mystery, family drama, and I had as you say incubated it over a long period and it shot out.

DB It sounds very much like each book has been very different so there is no set way for you to do this.

AL I don't tend to think this is the time for my next novel so where shall I start? I'm a bit of a believer in your brain having more in it than you think. If you trust it. Now here's a different book *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye*. I was at that stage with Walker Books. *Tinker's Career* was my first book published with Walker Books. They were a young company then and were looking for good teenage fiction. I'd written two for them and that was the moment this dream moment when a publisher says "well Alison, what are you going to write next?" So I hadn't quite known what my answer to that was going to be but when Wendy Bowes the top editor asked me that question I said well Wendy there are fascinating things going on in Russia at the moment. It is the Soviet Union but things are cracking up and there is this guy Gorbachev, and Wendy was going "oh yes this is a long way away" and I said I have friends who are tied up in this. And she said "Ah, now that makes a difference." I said I'm a Quaker and there is a Quaker youth theatre which is very active and out there in the world. They have made contact with a youth theatre in Russia, in Moscow, and if I perhaps write a love story ending in tears of course between somebody from a youth theatre here falling in love with somebody in a teenage sort of way with a member of the youth theatre in Moscow. She said that sounds absolutely great just go away and get on with it. So that was another one with a spark that came from the kind of world I was living in. But then I had to do intensive research. This was an extraordinary thing because I went with my husband Frank, and we booked on a certain week, and most of the tours of the Soviet Union were going all over the place. But I said no I just want Moscow so that

restricted the choice so we went from the 3rd to 10th November 1989. It was any old dates and that was fine. And I made notes all the way and I got all these contacts. At one point I had to interview some teenagers, some Moscow teenagers in French because that was their only language I could speak – they couldn't speak English. That was a bit of hard work. O level French!! And then the father of one of these teenagers got in touch on the last day we were there, which was November 9th, and he said would you like to meet up again? There are some very strange things going on in East Germany. I thought what does he mean? But he suggested we meet at a certain Metro station. He said the entire East German Communist government had resigned. The entire government. And we'd seen funny things – limousines whizzing through Red Square as if they'd got something frightfully important to do. But we thought this is the Soviet Union where all sorts of things go on. Anyway we said goodbye to this guy, went back to our hotel, got up early the next morning and caught the plane. We got back to a mainline station in the UK and bought a newspaper and it said Berlin Wall open. So what had happened there was I'd got all my research, I'd even said when it was raining, and how cold it was. I'd got all my research for that week which ended with the opening of the Berlin wall which changed Europe forever. And another thing I realised was that half way through this week one of those whizzing limos had been the East German boss saying to Gorbachev if we opened the Berlin wall would you send the tanks into East Germany and start as you did in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland? And would there be huge conflict? And actually what historians

now realise is that Gorbachev went "oh no it will be an entirely internal matter." So we had witnessed this turning point in history and I knew I had to set my novel during that week. I'd got all the ingredients without actually knowing how vital those ingredients would be. So the youth theatre would be in Moscow that week, there would be these dramatic events. It was a time when they did these great big parades with fireworks and tanks. So I had them going there. Then there was this young man, a bit older than the girl, who was from the UK youth theatre. Then I'd have her having a boyfriend back home. Then she feels everything is very heightened. So then all this drama happens and it made an amazing background. And I didn't get the title for that for a long time. Then suddenly *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye* came to me. The thing I really like about it is that I sometimes call it Kiss the KGB – from the initials. So that was a different thing. But I had this intensive planning and then a completely other light was shone on it by events.

Question 2

DB The second question which we may have answered already was as your writing has progressed do you now plan your novels in a different way?

AL I think what I'd say in answer to that is just thinking back to what I've said, particularly about *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye*, I do my research and I plan and it's always provisional because you never know what is going to come up. And in this case this very significant thing came up. Now *Tinker's Career* which dealt with the illness of Huntington's chorea. If I

had found out half way through writing it that Ian McEwan was writing a novel, which he did about twenty years later, with that very background, I would have thought oh I can't do it this way. I've got to use a different illness. You know things will come in that are actually relevant – it may be to the state of your plot, that new research has appeared that means the basis on which you wrote this plot is undermined or suddenly changed then you've just got to face up to that even if you think oh all that work. But there is also the other thing of the marketing. I'm quite struck by Ian McEwan taking this particular illness in his novel *Saturday* – and if that had come and crossed my path at that time I would have changed for that reason. So I do this research and people say nothing is ever lost and I do take an interest in the research in an active ordinary human way and not to feel disappointed if I have to say oh crumbs.

DB And it must happen lots of times.

AL Yes absolutely.

Question 3

DB Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework. For example grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, deadline.

AL Yes I do. I wrote my first novel when I had very small children. And within a timescale I only had a couple of hours a week to research and write. Now there is a quote from Fay Weldon which enlightens this very well. It might be on the web somewhere. Fay Weldon said take the question – do you eat when you feel like it or do you eat when you have

set meal times? Well in life you could nibble all the time but it is more convenient to eat at mealtimes. Well it is the same with creativity. You could say well I'm only creative at 10.30 in the morning and 3.30 in the early morning in the middle of the night. But in fact if you've only got certain times to write and if you're really creative you'll be creative then.

DB That's a very good answer. It really is.

AL I find grammar and punctuation easy and I enjoy these disciplines. Do I put a dash at the end of what somebody says or do I put a dot dot dot. When they say oh darling I really do love you it's just that. Is that a dash or a dot dot dot. How I enjoy the discipline of thinking when to end a paragraph and then close it off again maybe and all those sort of things. Genre I find quite difficult because publishers have their ideas of what a genre is. And if it doesn't fall into any genre they will say oh in that case is it literary fiction. And I don't think I'm clever enough to do high flowing literary you know. I don't do murders. But I think romance that is just romance is a little bit narrow. And I think that chick lit, well I'm a little bit old for that. These categories are a no no. I just like a good story.

DB And one the readers will like.

AL Exactly! So I think the genre is in a sense what I choose is narrative led fiction. Probably for women. And most probably for mature women. I love settings. To go to Moscow and feel it that cold in November. And

the atmosphere of caution and secrecy and the fear that was alive in the communist setting.

DB And of course you were within a very different culture weren't you?

AL And I enjoy that. I think constraints can really help you focus. If you have no constraints you can be all over the place. The setting and the landscape and the history I like to be somewhere to have my story told.

DB It's like the fact that you can read about a country in a book forever but unless you actually go and visit it you can't get the essence of a place.

AL You do.

DB Now what about deadlines? You obviously have deadlines.

AL I'm actually very good at deadlines. I think that is not a kind of problem I have. I remember at school thinking it was most unfair that I found it easy to answer all the questions in the time limit. Say I'd got 40 minutes to write an essay or 3 hours for an exam. I found that easy. Now some people's working methods were different and they found it difficult. I was at an advantage and they were at a disadvantage. And I thought that was really unfair. But if somebody says there's a deadline and for example take *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye* and I wrote it and they accepted it. But then they realised it was rather longer than it should have been. Something about the number of pages and I had to cut it down by a certain amount and Wendy said Alison you've got to do this within the

week or we are not going to meet our publication schedule. And I did cancel things, things I ought to have done, I had to ring friends and say I'm supposed to be doing this can you do it instead – things like giving a farewell party to a friend who was leaving the area, and some good friend and bless her just took it over because I said I've just got to do this. And it's being professional isn't it. I know with Adams and *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* they had to sit him in a room and lock the door if he was going to do any work at all. But I believe in being professional.

Question 4

DB Now moving on to No 4 do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity?

AL Well I'll answer that very briefly. I think planning and creativity can be mutually helpful.

DB I mean you could almost say that the planning is creativity

AL Yes isn't it. I mean with my very first novel *Beeston Castle* – I go up there and I think I wonder what that thing is up there in the castle grounds, up on this rock. Oh it's a well. Of course they need water. And you think that's research? And then I think well what's down there. And I think my young lad who is on the losing side of the historical battle –he goes down there, down on a rope to see if there are any treasures down there. And then someone from the other side comes along and cuts the rope. I've done my research, my planning, and I think it will all be at

Beeston Castle and then suddenly something opens up – so the creative bit comes in and there's the story. I think they feed into each other. As long as you are very open to new things that come in.

DB I think that's one of the secrets. You need to be open all the time rather than what you'd call a closed book if you like. You've got to really evolve with it.

Question 5

DB In your novel writing have you used any particular methods such as note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer data bases to assist you in your work?

AL I'll answer them one by one. I keep notes all the time. When I've got an on-going project I'll open a notebook. And these might be just phrases that sound good. Or making notes on facts. Catching a thought on the wing or realising that there's a left turn there that I haven't mentioned and it leads down to a certain area.

Journals - I've been in a habit of writing an on-going journal and I get rid of my stuff like why did I start writing this story? It's a waste of time. Why won't this story go the way I want it to? Or I'm really on top of it now.

My note keeping is about my novel. My journal is about the process.

Diary is the same thing as my journal.

Mind-mapping I don't do and it is for a very specific reason. The comic writer James Thurber had a book called *Let Your Mind Alone*. And I have a theory in my mind that if you just ask it a few good questions it is like a cauldron and it will stir things round and come up with answers in its own good time. So I don't watch the process I let it happen.

Computer data bases – no. I use the Internet for research and it is magic.

DB Yes I use the Internet as well. I don't use a data base as I feel it is getting too mechanical.

AL Exactly. I get on the Internet and find journals. So that's those.

Question 6

DB If you answered yes to any of the above how have these helped? I think we've more or less covered these haven't we.

AL Yes I agree.

Question 7

DB When starting a novel do you look for any of the following – (a) an idea, (b) a place, (c) a topical story from a newspaper, (d) a favourite time in history, (e) an event in your own life, (f) other (please state)

AL All. Yes to the idea for *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye*. A place from doing local history when I moved here. A topical story from a newspaper – the novel which I’m now trying to place with a literary agent was partly provoked by the Fred and Rose West murders because I happen to know someone who was involved with that. And I was giving them support through the dreadful time when it was all emerging. And that grew into a much bigger story. I didn’t handle that event itself but it was provoked by that. So yes definitely. A favourite time in history – yes. There is a novel I’ve not mentioned yet – it’s called *An Inch of Candle* – that is set in WW1 and it was where my Quaker contacts led me to a story which was about being a pacifist in WW1 – this girl is torn between the heroic man who lives along the road and she adores from afar and he goes to fight for King and country. While her brother, a weedy little character, is a pacifist. And she gradually reverses her view – this man who she thought was a hero is totally devastated by his experiences in the trenches and her brother she realises has had to find a very different kind of heroism to stand up to the authorities.

DB I think with WW1 a lot of news took a long time to filter through so eventually the penny dropped that all these young men were being slaughtered for no reason at all.

AL Absolutely. And it centred on the first few weeks of the battle of the Somme.

DB The next one is an event in your own life.

A pause

DB I think we do draw on our own experiences in life.

AL We do. And I'll say this quite frankly. There was a short story I wrote that was broadcast on Radio 4. And you will laugh because it was about wanting to murder my mother. She was a most infuriating woman. Physically very feeble and extraordinarily very domineering and there was a moment when I thought I could just murder you. And I wrote that into a story because we had a daily help who was a lovely woman and I kept in touch with her until the day she died – and she loved my mother, she was devoted to my mother. And it's called *Annie's Hands* and it was just those hands. My story is spoken from the view of the daughter who is feeling enraged and she looks at her hands and she thinks Annie would never have done what I have in mind. I mean it was never a plan. But it worked beautifully. And I said that because it was so close to my experience. I set it in the deep south of the United States of America – so Annie was black in the story. And it was the only way I could remove it from myself and Annie was this 'Gone with the Wind' – the devoted. A phrase came that was in that Alabama accent and I thought if I set it there I could do that. But if you've ever had that feeling of some ghastly impulse it is worth using.

DB Yes, because those feelings are very strong. If you have a problem with one parent you might for a long time feel guilty about it but really it's a very real feeling. I've spoken to other people and they've

said yes I felt like that – I was never allowed to do this or that.

Especially if you have a very dominant parent as well.

AL So that was a very interesting experience translating it into a different setting so that it became possible to write.

Question 8

DB **Where do your characters come from? (a) people I've known, (b) strangers I've observed, (c) family members, (d) friends, (e) they are a combination of people I've known, (f) they are completely made up, (g) other (please state)**

AL Now I would say I think any writer would say from a) to f) you observe people. You try and feel what other people are feeling. You take in all that but that's like the ingredients of the cake. I wouldn't put in a work colleague for instance as they are like the self-raising flour. You've got to then merge it with others, with your imagination. So I would say that they are a combination of people I've known. But then something else comes in which makes them quite different. The one I'm thinking of whose in the novel I'm now trying to place is a woman serving on a jury of a trial, rather like the West trial, and as I wrote it which took me a long time - I started it before the MA, and it was going nowhere – literary agents said how good it was but it wasn't publishable so I put it on one side and did something different and then came back to it and this woman is almost like a friend of mine now. She is completely different from me but she has come from somewhere within my imagination and she is a combination and she does have all sorts of characteristics but the

combination is like no other. She is a new person. And she lives. So I think that is my answer.

Question 9

DB Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?

(a) story from start to finish, (b) storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end, (c) plots, (d) sub-plots, (e) characters, (f) interconnection of characters, (g) chapters, (h) scenes, (j) other (please state)

AL Very seldom a storyline from start to finish. Sometimes I've got the start and the finish but I don't know what's in between. Sometimes I've got the storyline but not sure how it will unfold or end. I wouldn't say I've got the plots but I would say it's a structure somehow. And I think it's very connected with (f) – the interconnection of characters. So that I would plan out. And I would have certain chapter notes and some plots. Characters are absolutely vital – (e) you've got to have an idea of who these people are. And the interconnection between them. But (h) I need a few key scenes. I've been involved with theatre and play writing and somebody on a drama workshop said each scene should have a shift of power between the characters and I think that's vital. For example the moment when Tina in *Tinker's Career* says to her father you should have told me that my mother had this illness. That's when she had taken on some power in relation to her situation. Her father says but if I had done you'd have been frightened all the time. And she said I know that dad but I knew there was something to make me frightened.

DB And that really is a vital part of the story isn't it. Finding out.

AL Exactly. And of course she does sympathise with her father and she is quite grateful to him because you could go round being frightened all the time if you dropped a glass of water you'd think I'm going that way. But it is that thing about the shift of power. So I need some key scenes. I need the characters, the structure and some key scenes. And I'm happy to set off with those. But as I go on what I find is that I've got to really write the biography for each of my main characters. I remember a friend reading a first draft of this current novel and she said I'm still not sure why she responds in this way which is why she can't take part in this situation about whether these people are guilty. And I realised that I hadn't in my own mind been clear enough about the life of the woman – this major woman – before she reaches this point. I think it was in my mind but I needed to write it down and get it clear and make it clear in the book. So to start off with - characters, structure and key scenes. And then at some point during the process I'll go back and I'll sometimes physically write her childhood was like this or he had an accident when he was however old. This is the key thing – the dog bit him on the lip – so he always had this scar which he was terribly self-conscious about. Those sorts of things. So if you've got that you need to write the story. And in that case – I had this character writing a letter, he has a disabled daughter who he sees sometimes but not always and he writes her letters all the time. And he says I'll tell you about my friend Eamon's little terrier dog. So he does and how somebody says that's a dangerous dog

and had to have it put down. And his friend Eamon was saying don't put it down I love that dog –but I say yes he should be he is a dangerous dog and I felt guilty about that ever since. You know that sort of thing.

DB Yes. So you feel you are actually there.

AL Yes. I like to have these biographies of these stories that have led up to how that person feels.

Question 10

DB If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you? I think we might well have covered this slightly.

AL It varies. And when I was in that wonderful position of having deadlines to meet because I'd got a publication date then I'd answer those questions. I would have had everything sorted within that time. And it might make me a little regretful that there were other things that could have been improved if I'd had longer. It is very irksome not knowing whether your novel is going to be published or not – but having the freedom to get it precisely as you want it. And to know that the whole process of that story is now over for you so you are not going to return to it.

DB Now that is a very good point actually. I think there is a certain stage where you have to say goodbye to a book but if you have that feeling that if you'd had just a bit more time you could have improved it.

But I suppose you just really have to move forward. But I know what you mean.

Question 11

DB Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process? (a) yes (b) if yes – how do you make alterations to the novel to accommodate changes? (c) once I've invented characters I do not alter them, (d) no this never happens as I've planned everything meticulously beforehand, (e) other (please state)

AL I think (a) is the case. (b) is the case. I wouldn't say I've experienced (c). I've certainly not experienced (d). But if you want my final answer I would say that the key feature of my novel is that the character does change and the key to my writing is that the purpose of the plot is to change the character. Not completely – but a simple example is that I've got this woman who is on the jury and she doesn't feel able to make the judgement and to go into that jury room to make that final decision and she walks out and they are looking for her because they need her back and it is the days before mobile phones when she disappears. And what happens to her while she is away. It only takes place over 10 days or so, and all those happenings in the place she goes to change her so she feels she can go back. She couldn't stay away for more than that length of time. They said she was sick and they'd reached the point when if any more of them got sick they would have had to have a re-trial. So think of the expense. So they suspend the trial and they say we are sure Mrs so

and so will come back. But they have no idea where she is so they get the police to find her. And the police catch up with her just at the point when she is thinking I need to go back.

DB So she'd actually taken the time out to sort herself out. It was like an emotional journey for her.

AL Yes. You've put your finger on it. They go on a journey. They are in a state of crisis, they are open to experiences that might change them and the plot works on the character so that by the end the characters are changed and particularly changed in relation to that plot.

DB It is very similar to that film isn't it where one of the jurors wants a not guilty verdict.

AL Yes. I think it was called Twelve Good Men and True.

DB They too go through the journey he is going through and again there would have to be a majority and so it is very similar.

AL In fact I have a thing about my own experience. I was on a jury and it wasn't that I thought this guy wasn't guilty. I thought that he was guilty and stupid and the cleverer ones had been in charge and had got away leaving him to carry the can. And so I wanted him to be found not guilty. But I was pressurised. And eventually these people said look he is guilty

he was involved in it. I said yes and gave way and my intense feeling of being pressured to do what I considered to be the wrong thing actually worked inside me to say one day I'll write about a jury. Well of course legal cases make a good plot.

Question 12

DB It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery. When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned? (a) very close, (b) close but some plots have changed, (c) close but some characters have changed, (d) slightly different, (e) very different, (f) other (please state)

AL Somewhere between (d) and (e). They are always slightly different and sometimes very different. Because changes do happen along the way. I can give you an example with *Flesh and Bronze* which I've not actually talked about much have I. I remember in my interview with Andrew Biswell. He said I can see you've done quite a bit of writing. Are you going to write something on the basis of previous stuff or something new? I said I'm going to write something entirely new and these are the characters. A very degraded woman and a very posh proud man. Great differences in class, income, and gender and power. The theme rather than plot is that these two in some way redeem each other. That was I thought a really good idea but I realised as I wrote and I got to know these characters, because you do know them to begin with but you get to know them better.

DB **Yes you do. And you get to know what they will and won't do.**

AL Yes. And my character the Parisian bronze caster I thought would never let go of his pride. And the only thing is that Juliette the elder lady, the ex-prostitute, does gain power and she manages to really put him in a corner so that he has to behave well towards the grandson who he despises. And she wants this grandson to be treated well. And it is partly the way the plot goes that he is locked into behaving well because he himself will be despised if he doesn't – so I've caught him on his own spot really but the last scene is where they are all in the place where all these bronzes are of Degas and he has to introduce his little grandson to all these people saying what a grand lad he is and how very artistic. And he has to treat Juliette, not as a despised prostitute, but there is a point where she says I'm a woman am I? Not a prostitute. She has gained in pride, the grandson has gained in stature, and he has got to recognise they are allowed to be decent people even though the one is severely disabled and the other has a past.

DB **So he has had a real journey.**

AL Yes, he's had a real journey but he hasn't changed internally. He's still this proud man on the outside saying why do I have to behave like this to all these people. But otherwise I'd have egg on my face. So we can see how it's somewhere between. These two didn't believe each other. But there was the power between them.

Question 13

DB Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

AL Well I've thought about this. And I thought I can't let a fascinating interview like this go, because it really is gorgeous isn't it where someone knows what you are talking about. It's lovely. I can't let it go without using the word mystery. Because it is a very mysterious thing. Because if you let it happen – you've got all that work that you are doing and it really is hard work – blood, sweat and tears isn't it, not to say loads of paper and computer time – because if in the end whether it works or not is mysterious. And I can remember something of mine that wasn't published that came between *The Crest of the Dragon* my first book and *An Inch of Candle* my second published book. There was another one where by this time I had a literary agent and he said **I'm** getting publishers saying it is good but it is not that good. And I knew it hadn't taken off. It hadn't had that magic. And something that really works when you say oh sorry can you just get me a cup of tea as I can't put this book down – that's the magic.

DB Yes, and I think when you are in the writing process and things are going well you do have good days like that and when new ideas come you somehow know that you've expanded on your original ideas.

AL Exactly. And it is almost sort of given to you as coming in from somewhere.

DB Yes. And it is strange as well that some of the books you buy and are on the market at the moment, some that have won high prizes, you very often find that you perhaps enjoy the first chapter and then it suddenly goes downhill. And you think how on earth did this book get published? And I think when you start writing yourself you get a bit more critical, you notice the structure, the scenes, the characters, and the way it is put together as well. But I suppose we are all different. It is all different personalities as well.

Acknowledgement

DB Thank you very much Alison. This has been a wonderful interview and I can't thank you enough for the time you've given to this.

AL It is a pure pleasure

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PRISCILLA MASTERS

Priscilla Masters is a celebrated author of crime and mystery novels. Her character Detective Inspector Joanna Piercy has featured in ten of her novels such as *Wings over the Watcher* (2005) and *The Velvet Scream* (2011). The young and attractive constantly battles to get her voice heard in a male dominated police force. Another character is coroner Martha Gunn. She features in five of her novels including *River Deep* (2004) and *Slipnot* (2007).

I chose to interview Priscilla Masters as I was fascinated to learn how she plans her murder mystery novels, how she deals with planting hooks for the readers, and how her knowledge of forensics is obtained. I wanted to know whether this genre required more pre-planning.

Interview Transcript

9 September 2011

PhD Student Diana Bradley

Interview with Priscilla Masters

DB First of all thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.

Question 1.

DB How much time do you spend planning and researching your novels?

PM That is a really difficult one to answer because I start with and work with an idea and I tend to do the research and planning as I go along. I'll write a few chapters and check them over. The Internet makes it very easy – you can stumble on one little fact and two seconds later you've got your fact. So I think that it is difficult by saying some six months planning and researching - I don't do it like that. It doesn't work for me.

Question 2.

DB As your writing has progressed do you find you now plan your novels in a different way? If yes, please explain methods.

PM No I don't. I might sort of sketch out two or three chapters ahead and that's about as much planning as I do. I think the big difference is that in the planning it is in the confidence that you can see the plot through and in having a sort of instinct that something is quite wrong and it has got to be removed.

Question 3.

DB Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework e.g. grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, and deadlines?

PM I'll go through them all bit by bit. I know grammar is essential and sometimes in dialogue we would use swear words and certain sentences and things like that. So grammar is the bricks and mortar of our books and if you take it away I find it quite unpleasant. I think you have to abide by the grammar except sometimes as I say in dialogue when we break it. But still a lot of the final editing will be to pop a comma in or a colon in or a dash or something like that. So punctuation and grammar are linked together.

Crime genre, which is what I'm in, is a very good one. I did once have to change a romantic novel to fit into the crime genre. But then they say it is all creativity - actually there is a huge amount of application and you need to decide this is what I'm going to be as a crime writer. It is like my work as a nurse I might not always want to do something in particular for a patient or see a patient but, whether I like it or not, it is my job and I have the same attitude to my crime writing. That's my job. That's why I'm published.

Setting can be a little bit limiting and I'm eternally glad that for my stand alones I can use any setting I want. But the D.I. Joanna Piercy ones are set in and around Leek. I was thinking the other day that if we hadn't moved to Shropshire I never would have created Martha Gunn. I'm always eternally grateful that I have got settings for my few characters and I have got to stay within those settings. But for my stand alones I can pop around. So again it is more of a discipline really.

Deadlines – I've fretted. When I had to write a four book contract I was given two and a half years and I couldn't sign it. I was terrified I

wouldn't live up to it. That it would limit me and make me less creative. In actual fact what happened was it was more creative – I signed a two book deal and within ten months both books were done. They were finished, edited, tidied up. And they were just finished. So, actually for me, although I was terrified of having a deadline, it worked in the opposite way. It was like I have a job to do, I have to see so many patients, and I have to finish this by the end of the day. It just worked in the same way. The attitude I have in my day job in nursing seemed to work as well.

Question 4.

DB Do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity?

PM No, not really. The reason I don't pre-plan is because I honestly don't know what is going to happen which most people who write will understand exactly what I'm on about. You need a certain amount of planning because we are limited with how many words we can use with our characters, dialogue and setting. So you've already got a certain amount of pre-planning sort of running around in your mind already. If you are creative you can't help but burst out and be creative and I just think that is it really.

Question 5.

DB In your novel writing have you used any particular methods e.g. note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer databases to assist you in your work?

PM The one I use most of all is a calendar. One of those where you've got a day and a date and you've got a line where you can write. And that, I think, is the most planning that I do but it stops me from moving incidents from February to March and to April and May and completely losing the plot and making it snow in the middle of July and stuff like that. That calendar is my stretcher and every time something happens I fill it in. I still manage to get it wrong – I haven't worked out that bit yet.

Question 6.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above have these methods helped? However I think the above explanation is sufficient don't you?

PM Yes. The calendar is essential for me otherwise I wouldn't have a clue what was going on quite honestly.

Question 7.

DB When starting a novel do you look for any of the following?

(g) an idea, (b) a place, (c) a topical story from a newspaper, (d) a favourite time in history. (e) an event in your own life, (f) other?

PM Right. Well it has to start with an idea. I mean that's the seed that starts the flower. It has to be something that interests you. For instance the book that I'm writing at the moment which was called *Smoke Scream* but I've had to change the title because the previous novel was called *A Velvet Scream* - so there is too much screaming going on and I had to start with an idea. I was lucky with that because I usually have lunch with buddies, three of whom are psychiatric nurses, and they were talking

one day about a fire that happened on a locked ward in a mental hospital and there were twenty four deaths – obviously very tragic. It was only in the 1960s – so well within living memory and that was enough. That was the seed. All it needed was a little water and some fertiliser. I could imagine people being in a locked ward and terrified and so on. So then I had to go back to the story in the newspaper. I would never use a topical story. Never. You are way behind. In fact with most of my stories I write the story and about a month after it has come out it seems that real life mimics events. And that has happened a few times.

A place? Yes very much so. I've set my current manuscript in a place called Molverley which is a fantastically nice village just outside Shrewsbury. The thing that interests me is that it has become a big flooding problem. There are two rivers there that converge. It has got a church that is a thousand years old. I've not actually got to the bit with the church. But if you make a little village like that, and it is a bit Miss Marple I know, but that really attracts me and I do like either a nice setting or an evil setting or something like that. I mean obviously the Joanna Piercy character is helped by having such a lot of Staffordshire moorland around and I've used them quite mercilessly really.

A favourite time in history? Mine are all contemporary apart from a romantic novel that I talked about starts off in 1787, but I don't think it echoes well into the contemporary period. An event in my own life? I would tend not to use but when people relate something for example my daughter in law told me about somebody who had turned up in the A & E department of the Royal Shrewsbury holding a baby and after she'd been

there a while they realised the baby was dead due to a cot death. I used that in *Facing Charlotte* with somebody turning up to an A & E department with a dead child but the child had been dead for about ten years.

Question 8.

DB Where do your characters come from?

- (a) People I've known**
- (b) Strangers I've observed**
- (c) Family members**
- (d) Friends**
- (e) Work colleagues**
- (f) Teachers**
- (g) Bosses**
- (h) Partners**
- (i) They are a combination of people I've known**
- (j) They are completely made up**
- (k) Other (please state)**

PM Well I can tell you now. They are combinations of people with mannerisms, facial characteristics, ways of walking, and things like that. And part of it is made up. They are all composite characters. It is very silly to use people you've known. I've done it on one occasion and that was for a charitable event and someone paid £500 to be a character in my book. But that was like a straight jacket because she said she did not want to be murdered or a victim or a killer. So I had this completely dead character if you like wandering through the book and there was no

particular purpose. I couldn't write anything at all rude about her because she wanted me to use her name. So I had this pointless character but it did raise £500 for the wind farm so I shouldn't complain. Sometimes names of people are interesting. On the wards where I work there are boards on the wall with names so you can find your patient and in fact they call them something like 2.1 or 2.2. so that you can go straight to the bed. One day I saw the name Solomon Breeze and thought what a wonderful name.

Question 9.

DB Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?

- (a) Storyline from start to finish**
- (b) Storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end**
- (c) Plots**
- (d) Sub-plots**
- (e) Characters**
- (f) Interconnection of characters**
- (g) Chapters**
- (h) Scenes**
- (i) Other (please state)**

PM I have a vague storyline but not sure where it is going. I can't add much more to that. It also keeps it exciting by not knowing.

Question 10.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you? Do you have a set time?

PM With the storyline it is all the time I'm writing the book so probably it used to be about a year. Now I've trimmed it down to six months. It will take me six months because the storyline is unfolding as I'm writing along. It is an integral process.

Question 11.

DB Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process?

- (a) Yes**
- (b) Yes and I sometimes have to create new scenes/or alter existing scenes to show them off to their full potential**
- (c) Yes and I often have to create a new character to display the mental thoughts of the original character**
- (d) Yes – but once I've invented them I do not alter them**
- (e) No this never happens as I've planned everything meticulously beforehand**
- (f) Other (please state)**

PM It tends to be answer (b). It would be very rare for me to bring in a new character I haven't planned. Any new character should appear in the first few chapters. I might drag in a character who is around and bring him or her into a scene earlier on which I've had to do with the book that comes out in October. I have a character that didn't appear until about chapter 8 and I thought that's a little bit late so I might sort of bring them in if only for background. But generally it would be answer (b).

Question 12

DB It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery.

When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned?

- (a) Very close**
- (b) Close but some plots have changed**
- (c) Close but some characters have changed**
- (d) Slightly different**
- (e) Very different to the one I set out to write**
- (f) Other (please state)**

PM Answer (a). It's always very close. I usually ring up my agent and she says "how's it going along?" and I say well, I've done a fairly meaty first draft but it needs a lot of work, and then when I go through it, which is what I'm in the process of doing for the one that comes out after the one in October, I realise that it is actually a lot lot nearer than I thought. So it always turns out to be answer (a).

Although I always think it is going to be answer (e). I always think it is going to be really different with big changes. But actually all I do is expand the plot and chuck out anything that is not trotting along at a rate of knots. Usually I'll say that I've done the first five chapters I'll pop back and then I'll alter.

My publisher likes 150 words as a blurb so they can flog a book. I do my own now because it is easier because I hate those blurbs that start off when so and so finds a body blah blah blah. I think it is all so

predictable. Surely we can move away from this – when Mr so and so goes away for a holiday and returns to find a body – I think oh dear here we go again. So I prefer to write my own blurb.

Question 13.

DB Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

PM All I can say is you need a good dollop of optimism. I think you need to have your head in the clouds and your feet on the floor. It doesn't get any easier. I think I'm on book 22 or 23 now. I don't know whether you set yourself different standards or whether a lot of the dialogue you realise is just being repetitious because you'd done it in books before. And you question whether you have that much to say. Then when you get into the book it's happy, you trot along. I do enjoy it. On a bad day it's bloody awful. We all know that. It's like being a three year old being asked to write an essay on Archimedes or something. It is just not going to work. But the days it does work it is fun.

Yes it is true you have to keep things fresh. Joanna Piercy solved so many murders you wonder what she can do next. But when I'm finishing off one I've always got an idea what I want Joanna to be doing next. And it is always different. But at some point, I don't know when, I've got to run out of ideas. But with going to work and mixing with a lot of quite interesting people, not just the psychiatric nurses, but the doctors, patients and their families, it means everyone has a different tale to tell and that keeps me fresh. I'll retire in a couple of years and then we'll have to see. Maybe that will be the time I'll dry up. I won't have that huge input of

drama because hospitals are a very dramatic place and somebody is always going through hell.

It's an amazing place to be. And with characters I love like Joanna. I mean Martha's different, she has twins, and emotionally she has kept the cupboard door shut. In *Smoke Alarm* she is starting to open up. And this is quite a shock for me. With Joanna I can see what she is – she is an easy character to analyse and she is younger and she is quite pig headed in many ways – but will apologise and eat humble pie. Many readers say don't let her marry Matthew for goodness sake as it is a disaster waiting to happen. But I say there is something wonderful about it. We don't want paint drying and I just love Joanna. And personnel do change - Superintendent Colclough is about to retire. He is going to get replaced and she won't get any more promotion now she has shot herself in the foot. I wanted her to do this. I didn't want her to be promoted. She is not a desk girl at all. So she is going to have a superior and that's going to be fun. I can see there are going to be sparks and fireworks because she is quite fiery at times and a bit naughty and arrogant. But she is also a rule keeper. Everybody says it is better to break the rules. I don't think that is fair as today's police force is like me being a nurse – you can't break rules. You just can't do it. I mean I do break the odd rule but I'll justify it. I'll log it in the notes and things like that and pass it by the person I'm supposed to pass things by. It is a difficult job in that respect but fantastically stimulating.

With crime series on television there needs to be a balance. It was either *Vera* or the one with Caroline Quentin in (*Blue Murder*) where it always

seemed to be her at home with three children screaming. I just hated it. I thought I'm not enjoying this. I want to see her at work and being professional. *Vera* didn't work for me. The moment I saw her walking on in that flat footed way and her coat flapping I thought to myself would you be impressed? You know, if your husband, your daughter, your lover, or even if you are a suspect, this woman comes flapping through whereas I'd expect someone to treat me as I would treat my patients and approach them professionally. Explain what you are doing, why you are doing it, and if arrests are to be made then have your evidence there. Brenda Blethyn is a fantastic actress but this must have been one of the worst things she's done.

It's like ages ago Pauline Quirke was offered the part of Joanna Piercy and I said no. Joanna Piercy is nothing like that. And yet she was in the *Sculptress* which was brilliant. Why do these actresses pick up a series like that and just plop themselves into them? With characters it is very useful to know what your characters are really like. I never had a picture of Joanna but I have a picture of Matthew and he is very like the Mentalist. He has that ruffled blond hair and quite a nice personality. I like Matthew but everybody says he is too weak willed. They whinge about him.

Acknowledgement

DB I would like to thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Your answers will help me enormously in my research.

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HELEN SEA

Helen Sea graduated from the London School of Economics before teaching children and adults with severe learning difficulties. An M.A. in Creative Writing for children is the latest part of her journey towards producing novels and stories for children. Her first novel called *Tar: The Wandering* (2011) explores the realms of relationship and trust. Devised in the form of a Norwegian myth it seeks to enable the reader to make sense of the world they live in. For this novel Helen wrote and adapted the music that accompanies the audio version.

There are two reasons why I chose to interview Helen Sea. Firstly she writes in a different genre to myself. Secondly she is a new writer and I wanted to learn if her planning techniques were different to more experienced writers.

Interview Transcript

27 February 2013

PhD Student Diana Bradley

Interview with Helen Copestake (writing as Helen Sea)

DB First of all thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.

Question 1.

DB How much time do you spend planning and researching your novels?

HC Well for me researching is vitally important so apart from being fascinated by knowledge I strive for authenticity. Sometimes there are years of research behind me and I include things like music, art, history, video, and I visit places. I research at the British Library in London and I've even been to the Ukraine to research a book and other places.

Question 2.

DB As your writing has progressed do you find you now plan your novels in a different way? If yes, please explain methods.

HC I just want to say that I word process most of my work now mostly for speed, whereas at one time I would find it very difficult to be creative without writing in longhand. But that is the way I plan and write and sometimes it is more off the cuff sometimes as I'm writing straight onto the computer.

DB I find that I write better when I use longhand and it means I can write in any place I happen to be. All I need is a notebook and pen. For some reason when I use the word processor it is almost like a

barrier between me and my writing. But I know a lot of people do use processors but it is just a personal thing isn't it.

Question 3.

DB Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework e.g. grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, and deadlines?

HC Yes, because I've had experience of being an editor of children anthologies. Then I've produced deadlines for myself and others. And there's always genre for the short stories so I'm printing and publishing deadlines. So yes that is something I can do.

Question 4.

DB Do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles creativity?

HC No I don't think it does because if you have a plan you can always change it. And if a character or an incidence sparks off another avenue of thought then you can go down it. I think pre-planning it does help me certainly.

DB Yes, I find the same with mine. At least when you've got a plan you can alter it if it is flexible enough. And it allows you, if you have any extra ideas, to put these in later on.

Question 5.

DB In your novel writing have you used any particular methods e.g. note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer databases to assist you in your work?

HC Yes I keep copious notes and often I keep things like art work and music. I will buy a CD if it has music that is related to something I'm doing. I keep articles – so I keep a whole file of notes of that kind but I also do

use some basic mind-mapping techniques and flow charts. I've recently begun to set up some data bases as I've become more accustomed to the technology. The one thing I really think is good for me is to create a graph. This is one of the things I learnt quite a while ago which is to do with high points/tension and conflicts and so on. I also believe in reading aloud to ensure the narrative flows.

Question 6.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above have these methods helped?

However I think the above explanation is sufficient don't you?

HC Yes definitely. With the notes one of the problems can be that they are scattered around and in one particular file I may have little scraps of paper with thoughts on the go. But I still would rather work from lots of notes. I think being able to graph out the points of tension and climax really helps me to have an overview of the novel and the highs and lows otherwise I might have three points of tension in one chapter and then nothing in the next and so on. And also how sort of serious that climax is as well. So you want points of tension in the chapter but you also need certain high points in the book so the graphs help me to cope with that. I did once write in sections and place the chapters in the order that made the most narrative sense but I've not done that since. And as I say the reading aloud for the narrative flow has really helped.

DB I think the idea of a graph is excellent. It is something I've never thought of doing but actually to get the high points of tension and possibly the low points as well is something I've never considered. So that's really useful information.

Question 7.

DB When starting a novel do you look for any of the following?

(l) an idea, (b) a place, (c) a topical story from a newspaper, (d) a favourite time in history. (e) an event in your own life, (f) other?

HC I think all of those do spark ideas but mainly something will just give me an idea. So I will say (a) is probably the main thing. I don't tend to particularly look for a place or a story from a newspaper. If one occurs to me and sparks off an idea then that is different. But it is not a place I'd go to for ideas. Again, a favourite time in history – I tend to like Tudors and Vikings – but I wouldn't go there just to research that kind of era. And for events in my own life – not particularly either. I do get sparks for my ideas from a variety of places.

DB Do you find that an event in your own life is sort of in your mind all the time and comes out in some of your characters?

HC I think not so much specific events that I'm looking for but perhaps if I'm looking to develop a character something from my past will sort of cover that or allow me to be more creative and add more meaningful content in. But I don't think I specifically look into my own life.

DB I think a lot of writers do tend to make characters out of a combination. I know in my first novel *Coffees* my favourite character was Georgina. I think it was mainly because she reminded me of a few people I'd worked with and also at the back of my mind was that because she was a very feisty woman it also made me think she was the type of woman I wished I could have been. But again a lot of daydreaming comes into it as well.

HC Yes I'd agree with that. And also I think perhaps more than real people that I've known it would be more the kind of character maybe that I'd want to be. But it would be a character that I'd invented.

Question 8.

DB Where do your characters come from?

(a) People I've known

(b) Strangers I've observed

(c) Family members

(d) Friends

(e) Work colleagues

(f) Teachers

(g) Bosses

(h) Partners

(i) They are a combination of people I've known

(j) They are completely made up

(k) Other (please state)

HC I would say that for the majority they are completely made up. But as I've mentioned the idea tends to be sparked by something else which is usually something visual or oral. And mixed media tends to be the way that I gain ideas and even words along those lines – because one of the stories that I've written I did the illustrations and music. And I see things as a film when I'm writing but I don't think generally speaking I work from real people.

DB It is strange that you mention that when you write you see a film. I tend to do the same mainly because I do this intercutting style where I switch between scenes and I always have in my mind when I'm writing that this is how it is going to look in motion. But I suppose we are all different but it is something I do.

Question 9.

DB Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?

- (a) Storyline from start to finish**
- (b) Storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end**
- (c) Plots**
- (d) Sub-plots**
- (e) Characters**
- (f) Interconnection of characters**
- (g) Chapters**
- (h) Scenes**
- (i) Other (please state)**

HC I think I would say yes to every one of those at some point during various stories I have written. It would tend to be 'storyline from start to finish' because I like to know where I'm going but I'm not so rigid that I can't then move away from that. Sub-plots would tend to come to me as other characters might be sparked off by the action that is happening along the way. But I also write down things like moments or sentences. It's rather like a jigsaw puzzle and I'll sort of fit them in together and I'll think that's a good sentence I'll use that for that character. And images as well – I might draw the character or a place on a map.

Question 10.

DB If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you? Do you have a set time?

HC It can actually be several months. What I do is try and write simultaneously so that other ideas are added in as I go along. And I also have at one point changed the whole premise of the book during that period. So it does take a while and so did the research. But I do think that it makes a vital basis for the writing.

Question 11.

DB Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process?

(a) Yes

(b) Yes and I sometimes have to create new scenes/or alter existing scenes to show them off to their full potential

(c) Yes and I often have to create a new character to display the mental thoughts of the original character

(d) Yes – but once I’ve invented them I do not alter them

(e) No this never happens as I’ve planned everything meticulously beforehand

(f) Other (please state)

HC Mine will change and evolve probably through creating new scenes or altering existing scenes rather than creating extra characters. I know that some people think it through and write it straight off. I couldn’t work like that at all because I do tend to work something out and then will decide I want to put something in because the ideas are coming all the

time. It is not just one idea – you get the main idea but then obviously other things are being evolved as you go along. So I would say it is by creating new scenes will help me to explain the idea.

DB Yes, I think that is quite common. I know when I did my second book *Carrington's* I used the Snowflake Method which means every scene and every chapter was planned out in advance – but once I started to write I found that I had no Interconnections between some of the characters so I had to bring in new characters and that meant new scenes. But as I said before the spine of the story was very flexible and I wouldn't be without that. But characters do change considerably.

Question 12

DB It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery. When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned?

- (a) Very close**
- (b) Close but some plots have changed**
- (c) Close but some characters have changed**
- (d) Slightly different**
- (e) Very different to the one I set out to write**
- (f) Other (please state)**

HC I wouldn't say it was very different to the one I set out to write because if I have the ideas then it has been sufficient to inspire me to write the book – but I do change some of the plot lines. But it is certainly close to the

original. It's not very close and I don't tend to write completely differently. So it is somewhere in the middle.

DB Yes I agree with that. I think it is a voyage of discovery and very often once we've put pen to paper all sorts of things happen – people change and plots change, so I agree with that.

Question 13.

DB Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

HC I think just to say that I would use any form of planning that I think would help a particular story or development – and it changes as I become more technologically advanced and I do try and keep up. At the moment I've started introducing data bases. I'm willing to try new things. I find it hard sometimes to focus on one aspect of writing as I tend to have several projects on the go at once but when it comes to one particular matter then that will become the whole focus of my attention.

Acknowledgement

DB I would like to thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Your answers will help me enormously in my research.

= = = = =

POSTAL INTERVIEWS

JOAN BAKEWELL

Joan Bakewell was born in 1933. She is an English journalist, television presenter, and author. In 2008 she wrote her first novel *All the Nice Girls*. Set in 1942 when the Ashworth Grammar School for Girls signs up for the Merchant Navy's Ship Adoption Scheme. Her second novel *She's Leaving Home* was published in 2012.

I chose to interview Joan Bakewell to discover if her journalist background influenced her planning approach to novel writing.

Diana Bradley
3rd year PhD research student
Manchester Metropolitan University
Crewe Green Road
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 5DU
Email: DIANA.M.BRADLEY@stu.mmu.ac.uk
Student Number: 02079789
Supervisors: Dr Robert Graham and Dr Nick Lund

As you are a successful and published author I would be very grateful if you would fill in the attached questionnaire to assist me with my PhD in Creative Writing.

You may find the following information useful:

Why am I asking you fill in this questionnaire?

I am researching the methods writers use to plan and create their novels. The processes you use to construct your books will prove very informative to my study.

What does my PhD involve?

- (a) The writing of a novel (approximately 85 – 90,000 words) entitled *Carrington's* – a story about midlife problems set against the backdrop of a department store.
- (b) Production of a 25 - 30,000 word research project on the role of fiction writing with particular reference to planning and creativity.

Who will see the questionnaire?

The questionnaires will be treated in the strictest confidence. They will only be read by my two supervisors, and internal and external examiners. None of your answers will be used for any other purpose except my research project.

I agree to fill in the questionnaire sent by Diana Bradley as part of her PhD research.

Name Joan BAKEWELL.

Signature Joan Bakewell.

Date 23.9.11

1.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How much time do you spend planning and researching your novels?

Around 2 years.

2. As your writing has progressed do you find you now plan your novels in a different way? If yes please explain methods.

I have streamlined my research, improved my plotting, and made more notes on structure.

3. Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework e.g. grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, and deadlines?

Absolutely yes. The best writers need a structure. - ~~so do I~~!

4. Do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles natural creativity?

No. certainly not. Pre-planning goes on in every writer's head!

2.

5. In your novel writing have you used any particular methods e.g. note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer databases to assist you in your work?

I use every kind of research - all available documents & techniques, especially the internet. I read critically, too, all the time I'm writing.

6. If you answered yes to the above question how have these methods helped?

They underpin the accuracy of all I write.

7. When starting a novel do you look for any of the following:

- (a) An idea
- (b) A place
- (c) A topical story from a newspaper
- (d) A favourite time in history
- (e) An event in your own life
- (f) Other (please state)

all - where relevant:
but then are all
coming in my
imagination.
My latest - "She's Leaving
Home" is set in 1959-1962
an era I remember. I
draw on those memories!

8. Where do your characters come from?

- (a) People I've known
- (b) Strangers I've observed
- (c) Family members
- (d) Friends
- (e) They are a combination of people I've known
- (f) They are completely made up
- (g) Other (please state)

You can't stand outside
your own life own
experiences. However
nothing is consciously
based on any single
person, or event.

9. Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?

- (a) Storyline from start to finish
- (b) Storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end — ✓
- (c) Plots
- (d) Sub-plots
- (e) Characters — to some extent, but they develop.
- (f) Interconnection of characters
- (g) Chapters
- (h) Scenes — in general terms, but I visit places!
- (i) Other (please state)

10. If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you?

Oh, hard to say. Months!

4.

11. Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process?

☒ (a) Yes

(b) If yes – how do you make alterations to the novel to accommodate changes?

(c) Once I've invented characters I do not alter them

(d) No this never happens as I've planned everything meticulously beforehand

(e) Other (please state)

Things unfold as you go
along —

12. It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery. When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned?

(a) Very close

(b) Close but some plots have changed ✓

(c) Close but some characters have changed ✓

(d) Slightly different

(e) Very different to the one I set out to write

(f) Other (please state)

13. Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

Writing is elusive, personal & difficult
to pin down!

S.

POSTAL INTERVIEW

SUSAN HILL

Susan Hill was born in 1942. She is an English author of fiction and non-fiction works. Her novels include *The Woman in Black*, *The Mist in the Mirror*, and *I'm the King of the Castle* for which she received the Somerset Maugham Award in 1971. She was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2012 for services to literature. Many of her novels are written in a descriptive gothic style. She has an interest in the traditional English ghost story, which relies on suspense and atmosphere to create its impact. In 2004, she began a series of crime novels featuring detective Simon Serrailler.

I chose the author Susan Hill because her books are in a totally different genre to my own. I wanted to learn how she planned and created her novels.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How much time do you spend planning and researching your novels?

Not much.

2. As your writing has progressed do you find you now plan your novels in a different way? If yes please explain methods.

No

3. Do you think you can be creative within a planned framework e.g. grammar, punctuation, genre, setting, and deadlines?

Of course!

4. Do you think the pre-planning of a novel stifles natural creativity?

Yes

1.

5. In your novel writing have you used any particular methods e.g. note keeping, journals, diaries, mind-mapping or computer databases to assist you in your work?

occasionally use notebooks.

6. If you answered yes to the above question how have these methods helped?

to useful & invaluable,
depending on the book -

7. When starting a novel do you look for any of the following:

- (a) An idea ✓
- (b) A place ✓
- (c) A topical story from a newspaper X
- (d) A favourite time in history X
- (e) An event in your own life X
- (f) Other (please state) ✓

8. Where do your characters come from?
- (a) People I've known
 - (b) Strangers I've observed
 - (c) Family members
 - (d) Friends
 - (e) They are a combination of people I've known
 - (f) They are completely made up ✓
 - (g) Other (please state)

9. Before you start writing have you mapped out any of the following?
- (a) Storyline from start to finish *no*
 - (b) Storyline – but not sure how it will unfold or end *no*
 - (c) Plots *no*
 - (d) Sub-plots *no*
 - (e) Characters *vaguely*
 - (f) Interconnection of characters *no*
 - (g) Chapters *no*
 - (h) Scenes *no*
 - (i) Other (please state)

10. If you answered yes to any of the above how long did the process take you?

3.

11. Do you find characters often change/evolve during the writing process?

- (a) Yes
- (b) If yes – how do you make alterations to the novel to accommodate changes?
- (c) Once I've invented characters I do not alter them
- (d) No this never happens as I've planned everything meticulously beforehand
- (e) Other (please state)

They evolve as I write.

12. It is often said that the first draft of a novel is a voyage of discovery. When you've completed your novel how close is it to the original story/ideas you planned?

- (a) Very close
- (b) Close but some plots have changed
- (c) Close but some characters have changed
- (d) Slightly different
- (e) Very different to the one I set out to write
- (f) Other (please state)

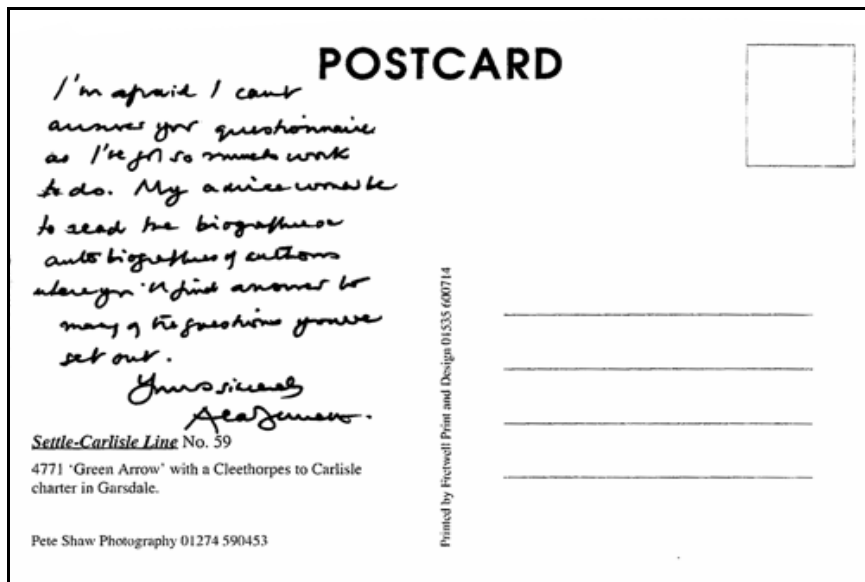
I only do 1 draft ever.

13. Do you have any other comments or information that you feel may be useful.

I am an intuitive writer, not a planner.

4.

POSTCARD FROM ALAN BENNETT



NOTE FROM JANE ASHER

Jane Asher

I'm so sorry Diana, realistically I'm not going to get round to doing this, and as a very limited novelist I don't think my answer would really be useful in any case -

I am sorry, and hope the
Phd goes well - Jane -

With Compliments

READING SURVEY RESULTS

COVERING LETTER FOR READER SURVEY

WHY AM I ASKING YOU TO FILL IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?

I am presently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at MMU
Cheshire.

This involves writing a 70,000 word novel and a 30,000 word
research project on the creative process and pre-planning of fiction.
Part of this research considers fiction from the point of view of the
reading public.

I would be very grateful if you could assist me in this research by
filling in the attached questionnaire and returning it in the attached
stamped addressed envelope.

I confirm that your name will not be mentioned in the PhD research
and that you will be identified by a numbering system. The
questionnaires will only be seen by me, my supervisor, internal and
external examiners.

I would like to thank you for your co-operation.

Signature

Name

Address

.....

.....

QUESTIONNAIRE (1)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback ✓
- Kindle
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓

- Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (2)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/~~paperback~~
- Kindle
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never ✓

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes

- Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (3)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback ✓
- Kindle
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes

- Never ✓

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (4)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback
- Kindle ✓
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes

- Never ✓

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (5)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

☐ Always

-

- Sometimes

- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

☐ Hardback/paperback

- Kindle

- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always

Sometimes

- Never
5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always

Sometimes

- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always

Sometimes

- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

Always

- Sometimes
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always

Sometimes

- Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

Always

- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (6)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- ☒ Always
-
- Sometimes
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always
- ☒ Sometimes
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback

☒ Kindle

- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always

☒ Sometimes

- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes

Never

6. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always

Sometimes

Never

7. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes

Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes

Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always

Sometimes

- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (7)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always

- Sometimes

☐ Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

☐ Hardback/paperback

- Kindle

- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

☐ Always

- Sometimes

- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always

- Sometimes

☐ Never

-

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes

Never

-

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (8)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback ✓
- Kindle ✓
- ~~E-book~~
Audio books ✓

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (9)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

- Hardback/paperback ✓
- Kindle
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always
- Sometimes ✓
- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never ✓

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

- Always ✓
- Sometimes
- Never

=====

QUESTIONNAIRE (10)

1. When choosing a book how much does the cover influence you?

- Always
- Sometimes

☐ Never

2. How often is your choice of book influenced by a friend's recommendation or word of mouth?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

3. What is your favourite form of book?

☐ Hardback/paperback

- Kindle
- E-book

4. Are you ever persuaded to buy a book after reading reviews?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

5. Do you ever buy a book while just browsing?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

-

- Never

6. How much does the familiarity from an author influence your choice?

- Always

☐ Sometimes

- Never

7. When considering a book purchase how often do you read the opening sentence(s)?

- Always

- Sometimes

☐ Never

8. How often do you read the first chapter when choosing a book?

- Always

- Sometimes

☐ Never

9. How often do you read the synopsis when choosing a book?

Always

- Sometimes
- Never

=====

DIARY

THE WRITING OF *CARRINGTON'S* 2009 - 2013

2009

September

The novel has been planned using R. Ingermanson's 10 step planning approach. Chapters, characters, plots, sub plots, and scenes have been worked out in advance. I thought that compared to my first novel *Coffees* which had absolutely no planning this second novel would flow much easier. But a new problem has surfaced.

October

After starting chapter one I had to alter my original plans. When I put pen to paper something strange happened. The theory of the Snowflake method seemed fine but once the writing started there were many holes in the plan I had not thought about. This was quite a surprise. What I hadn't planned for was how I'd get to the inner thoughts of some of my characters. For this I realised I had to create some new characters to interconnect the original characters. I attended PhD creative writing workshop. Feedback suggested my main problem was not staying in the moment. Exposition was confusing readers. I need to keep a focus on my writing.

November

I invented the new character of Verity as the best friend of Helen and Celia in order to tell the inner thoughts. In time Helen and Celia are on opposite sides and Verity would prove very useful at telling each of them what the other was doing.

December

By the end of writing chapter one I felt Helen deserved to be a major player. William cannot proceed as the main character without the interaction of a wife and the troubles/irritations he finds as he goes through the many changes in his

life. I now had to write more storylines for Helen. Firstly she would cause William great irritation by insisting on returning to work. This emphasised William's mid-life crisis problems and increase the stress he was already under from work.

2010

January

Tony Benson, assistant store manager, was introduced earlier than expected into the story in order to bring out Margaret Haddock's behaviour with men once inebriated. He is the victim of her sauciness while attending the silver wedding anniversary dinner of William and Helen.

February

I decide to introduce Patrick from menswear as a friend and confidante of Toby. He attends the silver wedding dinner and teases Toby about the behaviour of Margaret. This is the first hint of the plan the two of them later hatch.

March

I had originally decided to start chapter two with Helen starting her new job. However, Robert thought it was a better idea to leave this scene until chapter three in order to let the reader digest the row the previous evening between William and Helen and also to keep the reader waiting for her next appearance. Instead the story follows William going into work the day after the silver wedding dinner and still furious about having to cancel the holiday to Tenerife. I introduce the character of the sarcastic and smug area manager, John Gray, to increase the stress William is under. The two of them go out for lunch and as he is leaving John Gray drops the bombshell that the store may be taken over by the American company Rightways.

April

Helen starts work at the law firm. She discovers she has a young unhelpful boss called Jonathan. She works late to catch up with the work load and the unfamiliar computer system. Margaret Haddock oversleeps and the readers are introduced

to her complaining and housebound mother Grace Haddock. Readers can now sympathise with Margaret and realise her often outlandish behaviour is a release of stress. We also note that Margaret likes to drink in the evenings, once her mother is in bed, to blot out the misery of her life.

May

William attends the wedding of his Godson Henry and meets divorcee Celia Langridge who he is attracted to. Donna (store detective) is introduced as she shadows two young girls who are behaving suspiciously near the cosmetic counter. Security man Reg Perkins is also introduced. He adopts a military style manner but has a dark secret. He falls asleep in his office and a fire starts when his cigarette falls into the waste paper bin.

June

Helen discovers she has to go to Amsterdam on law business. This situation will add more stress to her marriage to William who she knows will disapprove. Judy from accounts is introduced as an ally to Helen within the company and to get into Helen's inner thoughts. Reg is treated as a hero after fooling everyone that he was in complete control of the store fire which he actually started. Celia tells Verity she has met someone new but does not disclose William's name.

Carrington's store has now become the backdrop for the drama of the novel rather than the main theme. A mid-life theme now seems such an obvious choice. I created my characters not realising at the start that they were all approaching or had passed the age of forty. This has come about with the evolvement of the characters and the storylines involved.

July

Patrick and Toby hatch their plan that one of them should bed Margaret. Reg photographs a new girl in the park and we see the collection of photographs he has in his spare room. Margaret gets in trouble with Grace for being late and once Grace is in bed she gets inebriated and forgets about all her troubles. Helen tells William about her trip to Amsterdam and he is furious.

August

John Gray visits the store and reports that Rightways may now take over Carrington's store. William fears for his job – he is over 50 and would find it difficult to get another job with the same pay. Helen arrives in Amsterdam but Simon is furious that his suitcase has gone missing. She meets senior European partner Gerry and he offers Helen the chance to train as a solicitor. Margaret discovers Grace has had a fall.

September

I now realise how much my novel has changed since conception. The characters are evolving and this means it is going in a different direction. I now have to think long term – this will involve adding new scenes. William feels under stress and tries to phone Helen in Amsterdam but she is not in her room. He then decides to ring Celia who invites him over for a late night snack. Donna visits her father in his old people's home – she tells him the affair with Bobbie is over. But she feels she will soon meet someone special. Margaret visits her mother in hospital – but is starting to enjoy her freedom. Reg is spotted by the student he is photographing. She challenges him.

October

Carrington's is changing so much. Although I planned the novel in great detail I find that now I'm getting into the writing that certain sections are not working. I've already introduced two new characters – Verity and Judy. I am using the pre-planned skeleton of the novel to adjust scenes or story lines. This skeleton is very flexible and makes changes/re-writing simpler. The Snowflake method is working well – particularly if I compare it to my first novel *Coffees* where I did no planning and spent an enormous amount of time re-writing scenes. Celia goes with William to see a consultant about his chest pains. She then goes to Church Close to pick up some items for William. While there she tries on Helen's clothes. She then deletes the message on the answerphone from Helen. Helen has an afternoon off and meets Gerry by accident so they have coffee together.

November

I have completed another synopsis. I now feel the story is better balanced.

I've changed William's surname from Cavendish to Haversham as my supervisor thought the surname was too like the store name of *Carrington's*. I've also changed Jonathan's name to Simon to avoid confusion with the area manager John Gray. Margaret is making the most of her freedom – shopping, cinema, and hairdressers. William gets the all clear from the heart specialist – and told his problem is stress. Celia invites him to spend a few days at her flat to recover. Patrick notices Margaret's new appearance and starts to flatter her in the hope of winning the bet with Toby. Reg is missing going to the park and only has his photographs for comfort. Donna visits an art gallery with Sophia then kisses her. Celia makes a great fuss at having William to stay. When she goes to visit Church Close to pick up the mail she visualises what it will be like living there in the future. Helen gets a visit from Jonathan in her hotel room to say he'll stand in the way of her getting any promotion within the firm. She then leaves a message on the answerphone for William. He and Celia sleep together. Reg reads about the student that has gone missing in the local paper. The reader at this stage does not know whether Reg has anything to do with it or not. William goes home and picks up the latest answer phone message from Helen but is curious to find no previous message that she refers to. The incident room at Moulton police station is busy with the missing student enquiry. This is a good opportunity to introduce the larger than life character of D.I. Nicholls. They call another press conference. Patrick compliments Margaret on her new hairstyle and suggests they go to the cinema together. Reg, confined to his flat, watches game shows on the TV. Reg pays him a visit and accidentally sees the photographs of the missing student on the spare bedroom wall. He makes an anonymous call to the police.

December

I spent the Xmas break re-writing the earlier chapters.

2011

January

My supervisor suggested I change William's surname away from Haversham. I have now decided on Patterson. Helen returns from Amsterdam. She knows she

has to tell William at some time about her plans to train as a solicitor. Reg is arrested over the missing student. Patrick takes Margaret to the cinema. He kisses her when saying goodnight on the doorstep. Margaret is very flattered. Reg is exhausted after being questioned endlessly in the interview room. Patrick takes Margaret to the Grange Hotel for dinner, hoping the event will soften her up and he will win his bet. They later sleep together. Helen gets home after a busy day. She is astounded that William is pleased about her being offered solicitor training. William later visits Celia and they sleep together.

February

My supervisor suggested that more drama could be made in Chapter 9 when Celia discovers William is married. The missing student turns up and Reg is released – but warned not to go to the park again. Patrick tells Toby he has won the bet.

Helen has her interview with senior partner Bernard Kramer and is accepted. Margaret is horrified that her mother Grace is to be released from hospital and her freedom will be gone. I write a synopsis for the remaining twelve chapters. The characters and corresponding storylines have evolved with time. Planning the synopsis for the rest of the book gives me an overview of the direction the novel is taking.

March

The addition of Verity is proving very useful as she is able to link up Helen, Celia, and William. Sophia has dinner at Donna's flat. They make love. Margaret has a visit from the occupational therapist and is upset that her mother is returning home. She cannot understand why Patrick has not called. She drinks too much wine and slips into a deep sleep. Helen starts to get stomach pains. She lunches with Verity and tells her that William has become more understanding about her new career. Celia buys some erotic underwear and is totally convinced that William will marry her.

April

Tutorial discussion suggested that Helen going to Amsterdam on a business trip was ideal as this would emphasise William's jealousy and insecurity. It also

gave a good opportunity for him to turn to Celia for comfort. Reg is suffering from the aftermath of his arrest and returns home to the word 'pervert' painted on the back door and the flat still in a mess from the police search. Margaret overhears Patrick boasting to Toby about sleeping with her and winning the bet between them. Patrick comes out of the office and realises that she has overheard. William and Celia go away for the weekend to a hotel while Helen thinks he is on a course. Helen is taken ill in the night and phones William on his mobile but he has switched it off. She rings Verity who arranges an ambulance to take her to hospital. PhD workshop feedback suggested my main problem was 'not staying in the moment' by applying too much exposition. This is distracting for readers. I need to keep my focus on the story. Margaret arrives home to find Grace in a bad mood. Later in the evening Margaret having drunk a bottle of wine stands over Grace with a pillow – realising that this is the one person standing between her and freedom. William arrives home and picks up Helen's message on his mobile. He is ridden with guilt. Donna and Sophia go flat hunting. Celia meets Verity for lunch. Verity tells her that William's wife has been taken seriously ill with burst appendix. Margaret wakes up in the morning to find Grace dead.

May

William takes Helen home from hospital. Ridden with guilt he makes a huge fuss of looking after her. He drives over to Celia's flat to announce that their affair is over.

Reg visits Margaret to offer sympathy over her loss. Celia takes revenge and rings the local paper and tells them about the takeover of *Carrington's* by Rightways. The next day it appears in print. John Gray visits William to say the merger is definitely going through. There will be some promotions and some redundancies. John Gray says he is moving to Head Office. William is left wondering what will happen to him.

June

The possibility of *Carrington's* takeover by the American firm Rightways is creating stress for William. This will not now be resolved until later in the novel.

Margaret learns her mother has died of natural causes – a heart attack and is very relieved. Reg is fed up of being at home and sees an advertisement for computer lessons. Margaret attends her mother's funeral with Aunt Ethel and Uncle Fred. Several staff members attend and also Toby and Patrick. Toby rings William to tell him about the takeover appearing in the local paper. William goes round to see Celia to accuse her. She denies it. He apologises – but also finds her still attractive.

July

The regular visits to the store by area manager John Gray are moving the story along. The meetings between him and William are both humorous and tense. John Gray is both sarcastic and manipulating and this heightens the stress that William is under.

Reg is doing well at computer class and now realises he can get all sorts of material on the Internet including porn. Margaret gets a phone call to go and see a solicitor regarding her mother's estate. She discovers that her mother had over a quarter of a million pounds stashed away. She realises she will have plenty of money to do all the things she's always wanted to do. Celia starts her sabotage on *Carrington's* stock.

August

Judy has only a small role in the novel but is proving very useful for getting to Helen's inner thoughts. She was introduced after I had started writing the novel. This has taught me in future to look at how I'm going to intertwine characters. Margaret makes her way through the airport on her way to Tenerife. She has forgiven Patrick and he is helping her with her suitcases. John Gray offers William the job of Area Manager. He has to move house and live in Lancaster. Gray also addresses the staff. Verity tells Helen over lunch that Celia has been let down by a man who has had a family crisis when the wife was taken ill. Helen realises that it was William. Reg buys weed killer to take revenge on Eric.

September

William is elated at the thought of telling Helen he is to be promoted and they will be moving to Lancaster. Helen confronts William with the news that she knows about his affair with Celia. Eric arrives home to find his grass burnt.

October

Donna discovers the damaged stock. Margaret is enjoying Tenerife and has met Pablo. Reg is made redundant but told about a job as janitor at a block of flats opposite the park. This leads to a new situation as he has a pass key to all the apartments and this will prove too much temptation for his perversions.

November

Helen tells William she is not going to move to Lancaster and insists on keeping her own career going. Donna asks Reg to mend a washer in her en-suite. He attaches a video recording device in the light about the bed where Donna and Sophia sleep.

December

I decide to set the last two chapters six months ahead. With the passing of time many events have now been resolved. But there are some surprises for the reader which will bring together the plots and the characters.

2012

January

I reached my goal of finishing my novel by Xmas 2011. This will leave me time to do re-writes and change certain scenes.

February

On re-reading the first draft of *Carrington's* I now see that many gaps could be filled. Some of the story lines could be improved.

March

After my tutorial I discussed with my supervisor ways of extending some of the storylines. He suggested that some of the high drama could be made more dramatic if characters such as Celia and Reg were to get their comeuppance – as so far they seem to have got off lightly.

April

I'm now going to change some of the first draft. William could resist Celia's advances for a longer period in order to build up the tension of whether he will be tempted.

May

The relationship between Donna and Sophia seems to happen too quickly. As this is Sophia's first lesbian relationship I will introduce a boyfriend for her which will create a tug-of-love situation, and show the emotions that Sophia goes through to come to terms with her sexuality.

June

At my tutorial it was discussed that there are two acts of sabotage – one from Celia damaging store stock and one from Reg pouring weed killer on Eric's lawn. It was thought that Reg should choose his revenge against Eric in another way – perhaps a physical fight. These changes will, I feel sure, result in a better balanced novel. It is on reading the whole of the first draft that gaps appear.

July

At the beginning of writing my novel I chose pictures from an Internet site for my characters. I have now bought the photographs. I find it reassuring to have pictures to hand. I will also use these pictures on my website once my novel is complete.

August

At present on holiday in France. I am using the time to re-write some chapters. Being away from the UK is a good opportunity to read through my notes.

September

The autumn term started and the PhD workshops commenced again. I am finding the comments from the workshops very informative. Often other members come up with ideas I've never thought about. This gives me a chance to add scenes. At the September workshop it was suggested that I add an extra scene for my character Margaret Haddock before she discovers that Patrick slept with her for a bet. It was suggested that Margaret is so taken with Patrick that she thinks she is in love with him. This scene acts as a precursor for the fall she then takes on discovering the cruel bet and the humiliation she feels.

October

I've decided to make more scenes for Patrick to heighten his gambling addiction. When he wins the £200 bet from Toby I feel it is a good idea to see him putting the money on a horse.

November

At this stage I am thinking of creating a bigger role for Gerry. As he runs the European side of the company he befriends Helen and helps her career. It may be a good idea to have Gerry and Helen becoming an item – or at least a hint in this direction.

December

Moving house and Xmas took up a lot of my time. However I did read a couple of novels on the theme of mid-life which gave me some material for *Carrington's*. I discovered a book by the American journalist Gail Sheehy about the ten year shift in mid-life. This has enabled me to not only understand my characters much more but to give an explanation for their behaviour.

2013

January

The month of January was taken up with research. I looked further into the world of the department store and also into the area of mid-life problems. This has helped me to understand the problems of my characters. William is going

through a mid-life crisis with reference to the break-up of his marriage and his job being on the line.

February

I am now amending and adding new scenes to *Carrington's*. Donna has been a difficult character to get right. I have decided to add a scene where she goes to a lesbian club called Valentines but discovers a lot of the members are much younger. This adds to her feelings of isolation.

March

I have written a new scene featuring Gerry visiting Helen at her new flat. They are now good friends as well as business colleagues. However, I've left the door open for the chance of romance to develop in the future.

April

The last two chapters now move the story on twelve months. I think this is better timing in comparison to my previous idea of six months. The twelve months allow time for William and Helen's divorce to be finalised and time for the house at Church Close to be sold, and William to buy a new home in Lancaster.

May

The final draft of *Carrington's* is handed in to my supervisor for marking.

June

Several scenes have to be re-written. I have altered the house in Church Close to Victorian rather than Edwardian. This allows for the explanation in the novel about the houses in the close once belonging to mill owners in the cotton industry.

July

I have decreased the scene where Donna and Sophia go to the art gallery. It was felt there was too much detail about the technical side of the paintings and this was holding back the story.

August

Final re-writes completed.

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